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E-MAIL: [ahpjourn@gmail.com](mailto:ahpjourn@gmail.com)

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PLEASE NOTE: This work contains texts and images considered sacred by people of the Asian Highlands. Please treat this volume respectfully in accordance with their wishes.

FRONT COVER: A woman demonstrates the use of a sling in Rtse khog County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho ngon (Qinghai) Province, China (photograph by Sha bo sgrol ma, August 2011).

BACK COVER: A woman's hair decoration known as *xu pa* in the Wutun language, in Rgya tshang ma Village, Rong bo Town, Reb gong (Tongren) County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho ngon Province, China is worn by women at their coming-of-age ceremony (*skra phab*), at her wedding, and during the annual Klu rol festival during a danced performance by women to delight the deity, Btsan rgod (photograph by Tshe ring skyid, 14 July 2011).

## ABOUT ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES

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CK Stuart, Gerald Roche, Tshe dbang rdo rje ཚེ་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ། 才项多杰,  
Timothy Thurston, and Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

*Asian Highlands Perspectives (AHP)* is a trans-disciplinary journal focusing on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding regions, including the Southeast Asian Massif, Himalayan Massif, the Extended Eastern Himalayas, the Mongolian Plateau, and other contiguous areas. Cross-regional commonalities in history, culture, language, and socio-political context invite investigations of an interdisciplinary nature not served by current academic forums. *AHP* contributes to the regional research agendas of Sinologists, Tibetologists, Mongolists, and South and Southeast Asianists, while also forwarding theoretical discourse on grounded theory, interdisciplinary studies, and collaborative scholarship.

*AHP* publishes occasional monographs and essay collections both in hardcopy (ISSN 1835-7741) and online (ISSN 1925-6329). The online version is an open access source, available at <http://plateauculture.org/asian-highlands-perspectives>. The print edition of the journal is available to libraries and individuals at-cost through print on demand publisher Lulu.com at <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/AsianHighlandsPerspectives>. The journal currently has a core editorial team of five members and a consultative editorial board of twenty-five experts from a variety of disciplines. All submissions to the journal are peer-reviewed by the editorial board and independent, anonymous assessors.

*AHP* welcomes submissions from scholars with an interest in the area. Given the dearth of current knowledge on this culturally complex area, we encourage submissions that contain descriptive accounts of local realities – especially by authors from communities in the Asian Highlands – as well as theory-oriented articles. We publish items of irregular format – long articles, short monographs, photo essays, fiction, auto-ethnography, and so on. Authors receive a PDF version of their published work. Potential contributors are encouraged to consult previous issues.



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# A SPACE FOR THE POSSIBLE: GLOBALIZATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR TIBETAN STUDENTS IN CHINA

Rebecca A Clothey (Drexel University) and  
Elena McKinlay (Independent Scholar)

## ABSTRACT

With growth in China's tourist industry and international trade in recent decades, learning English has become a threshold for determining who can get what others cannot. There are many opportunities to master and become culturally competent in English in the prosperous urban and eastern coastal areas where foreign businesses and tourists are common. Disparities between east and west, urban and rural, and majority and minority areas continue to widen in China, raising the question of how to increase economic development in more remote rural communities. Meanwhile, how minority cultures might remain resilient amid the forces of globalization is a continuing concern. The tensions between globalization, development, and cultural identity as illustrated through an English language program for Tibetan speakers in one of China's poorest provinces, Qinghai, are described.

## KEYWORDS

Tibetan education, Qinghai, minority education in China

## INTRODUCTION

Increasingly fewer local communities are untouched by globalization in the twenty-first century. With the spread of English through globalization, English speaking has become a more valued skill and debates about its impact on sociopolitical, economic, and cultural domains in non-English speaking countries have increased (Tsui and Tollefson 2007). Critics of English domination view the spread of English as a form of linguistic imperialism, a tool for economic exploitation by more powerful western nations, and a means of displacing local languages and identities (Phillipson 1992). Indeed, Phillipson (1992) described English as a language that "gobbles up others and eliminates local cultural practices" (cited in Yim 2007:43). Conversely, advocates view knowledge of English as a necessary tool to compete in the global economy and international politics (Tsui and Tollefson 2007).

With the growth in the tourist industry and international trade in China in recent decades, learning English has become a threshold for determining who can get what others cannot (Wang 2004). However, opportunities to master and become culturally competent in the language are more plentiful in prosperous urban and eastern coastal areas where there are numerous foreign businesses and tourists. The disparities between east and west, urban and rural, and majority and minority areas continue to widen in China, raising questions of how to increase economic development in more remote rural communities (Postiglione 2006). Simultaneously, how minority cultures can maintain their resilience in the face of globalization is also a concern.

This article examines tensions between globalization, economic development, and cultural identity as illustrated by an English language program in one of China's poorest provinces, Qinghai. Although home to a large population of Tibetans and other ethnic groups, Qinghai is often a less-preferred tourist destination than the Tibet Autonomous Region, which it neighbors. Because it is not on the tourist circuit and there are few foreign investors there, it is comparatively less Westernized than such east coast metropolises as Beijing and Shanghai. This aspect makes the English Language

Program discussed in this paper (henceforth, ELP) a particularly interesting case, as it is implemented in a province where few locals encounter native English speakers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### English Language Teaching in China

China's Reform and Opening Policy (*gaige kaifang*) in the early 1980s resulted in increased interaction with native English speakers and provided a boost to the status and role of English (Adamson 2004). English language emerged as a means of accessing the political, economic, and technological powers of the West; a surge of English publications surfaced, and English became an important course of study for university students. Nationwide examination boards were also created to regulate English teaching and learning (Wang 2004).

English language learning continued to grow in importance through the 1990s and into the new millennium, reaching a point where it was seen as "something more than a language ... not simply a tool but a defining measure of life's potential" (Osnos 2008:2). English proficiency was viewed as a vehicle to study and live abroad, find a better paying job, and be promoted. Jobs for translators and interpreters became more attractive, numerous, and lucrative than before (Adamson 2004). International events hosted in China such as the Asian Games (1990 and 2010), the International Women's Conference (1995), the APEC meeting (2001), the World Expo (2010), and the 2008 Olympics meant that the pervasiveness of the demand for English skills increased in the service sector. For example, new Beijing City government regulations were implemented which required taxi drivers as well as half of the 100,000 Olympic Games volunteers to learn English (Osnos 2008). English is a requisite for graduating from university,<sup>1</sup> demonstrating that English proficiency

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Gil and Adamson (2011) note that non-English-major college students must pass the subject College English and the College English Test



is an essential skill for improving one's socio-economic status in China. The simultaneous decentralization of the Chinese economy and the demand for English learning has also stimulated a multi-million dollar industry for private English training programs. Thus, in addition to English being taught in most schools from primary school (grade three) to university graduate courses (Cheng 2011), English is also offered through private schools such as New Oriental, English First, Li Yang's 'Crazy English', and a multitude of smaller cram schools for children. These private English language companies are particularly common in the large cities of eastern China, where disposable income is the highest. Over 2,000 English training institutes exist in Beijing alone, with an annual income exceeding \$287 million. In Shanghai, 300,000 people spend up to \$143.5 million annually on foreign language training (Clothey 2012).

The lucrative English language industry coincides with the geographical location of the majority of foreign residents in China. Xinhua reported in 2006 that the number of foreigners working in China had almost doubled since 2003, to over 180,000.<sup>2</sup> The majority is located in the large eastern cities of Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou, where business opportunities proliferate. In contrast, there are far fewer foreign residents in China's western Qinghai Province, and thus there are also comparatively fewer opportunities for the province's ethnic minority students to communicate with native English speakers. The disparities in the provision of quality English language education between China's East and West (Gil and Adamson 2011), and overall lower educational and income levels in the Western regions (Goodman 2004) further complicate this situation. In sum, while the demand for English resulting from globalization has created new opportunities, it also threatens to increase existing inequalities.

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(CET) Level 4 to get their degrees. However, the implementation of this policy may vary between provinces and within university departments.

<sup>2</sup>[http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2007-05/31/content\\_6177015.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2007-05/31/content_6177015.htm), accessed 2 October 2007.

## Education in China

China has made great strides in educational development since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education (*Jiunian yiwu jiaoyu*) was passed in 1986, establishing requirements for attaining universal education and guaranteeing school-aged children the right to receive at least nine years of education, including six years of primary education and three years of secondary education (Dillon 2009). However, educational inequity is a continuing challenge in China, as certain rural areas lack sufficient funds to provide conditions necessary for compulsory education, and some households cannot afford to send their children to school (Postiglione 2006).

This issue is particularly acute among ethnic minority children in rural China. Most of China's ethnic minorities continue to lag behind the country's majority ethnic group, the Han, in terms of education levels and literacy in Modern Standard Chinese,<sup>3</sup> and China's minority areas remain among the most impoverished. In fact, approximately two-thirds of Chinese citizens living below the poverty line dwell in rural areas of western China, where there are high concentrations of ethnic minorities (Dillon 2009).<sup>4</sup> In addition to poverty, fifty percent of China's illiterate population is concentrated in eight regions, all in western China (Yu and Hannum 2006). Five of these are provinces and regions, including Qinghai, that have high concentrations of Tibetans, one of China's fifty-five officially designated ethnic minority groups.

Since 2000, China has undertaken a 'Western Development Program'<sup>5</sup> (*xibu da kaifa*), in which additional government funding is earmarked for the autonomous regions of Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and Guangxi; the provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai; and the municipality of

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<sup>3</sup> Also called Mandarin Chinese, Putonghua is the official first language of the People's Republic of China.

<sup>4</sup> Dillon (2009) defines those having an annual income of less than 625RMB to be below the poverty line. In contrast, the Chinese government defines poverty as an annual income of less than 2,300RMB per year.

<sup>5</sup> Another common English translation is 'Open Up the West' (Goodman 2004).

Chongqing, to facilitate economic development in these areas. The impetus for the policy was the need to bridge the gap between the more prosperous east and the underdeveloped west. Improvement in education infrastructure was among many specific measures included in the policy (Dillon 2009).

The Chinese government has identified education as a key to increasing economic development in China. It manages "one of the oldest and largest state-sponsored preferential policies (*youhui zhengce*) for ethnic minorities" (Sautman 1999:174) and invests heavily in education in its western regions. Nevertheless, Tibetan rates of literacy and educational attainment remain among the lowest of the ethnic groups in China (Ross 2005), illustrating that the possibilities for economic returns from education are a particular challenge for Tibetans in some of China's most impoverished regions.

### Education of Tibetans in China

Similar to many countries, structural reasons are often cited as reasons for poor academic achievement among rural minority students in China. These include (but are not limited to) lack of resources to invest in quality schools and teachers in minority areas, poverty of rural families, and/ or household and production chores that compete with children's school schedules (Bass 1998, Postiglione 2006, and Wang and Zhou 2003). Perceptions of formal education's value also play a part. Friendship Charity Association (2009:4) provides an illustration of continuing education problems in one Qinghai county, stating:

Education has a low priority among herding communities. A recent local Education Bureau policy states that locals must send their children to school, however...[many] parents prefer to keep them at home to work. Parents also point to many college graduates who are 'waiting for work' in questioning the value of education. Consequently, students stay at home, herd, farm, get



married, stay within the community, and repeat the cycle of poverty, poor health, and environmental destruction.<sup>6</sup>

Cultural differences between Tibetans and Han, particularly in language, increase the complexity of providing adequate schooling in Tibetan areas (Caixiangduojie 2011). Tibetan language utilizes a different written script from Modern Standard Chinese. These languages are not mutually intelligible, however, most schools in China use Modern Standard Chinese as their primary medium of instruction. Furthermore, most English language learning materials in China are written in Chinese and English, and do not utilize minority languages. It is therefore difficult to learn English in China without first developing strong Chinese language skills.

Much of China's state school curricula, textbooks, and teaching materials are uniform throughout the country, regardless of ethnic, cultural, or regional differences. The cultural discontinuity between school and community life, shown through the oversight of ethnic languages, identities, and culture in the official school curriculum, discourages some Tibetan students from formal schooling (Postiglione et al. 2006, Wang and Zhou 2003). Tibetans thus face the question of how schools can be integrated with their ethnic values and traditions, and into their community development, while contributing to a rise in living standards (Postiglione et al. 2006).

In many areas, Tibetan students may choose to attend schools that offer Tibetan language curriculum along with Chinese as a second language. However, Tibetan-language schools are less likely to offer the opportunity to learn English, which, until recently, was taught only in Chinese-language schools.<sup>7</sup> For example, before the 21st century there was not a single individual competent in oral and written Tibetan, who had earned a BA in English, and was teaching English in Qinghai Province (Stuart and Wang 2003). The number of Tibetan English teachers has since increased.

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<sup>6</sup> Though widespread, low perceptions of formal education's value are not a universal feature of Tibetan communities.

<sup>7</sup> English teaching curriculum reforms were introduced in Tibetan schools from the early 2000's as part of the Nine-Year Compulsory Education policy, and were implemented at different rates across Qinghai.

An additional factor affecting Tibetan education is that graduates of Tibetan schools often do not speak Chinese as well as native Chinese speakers upon graduation, making it more difficult for them to compete in the job market. Perhaps these limited options are the cause for findings that Tibetans have little sense that schools are key institutions to help them integrate into the market economy (Postiglione et al. 2006, Wang 2007).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research builds on the findings of the US National Research Council that learners bring pre-conceived assumptions to the classroom, which are embedded in their cultural practices and beliefs (Bransford et al. 1999). Winzer and Mazurek (1998) state that difficulties in classroom learning arise when there is a discontinuity between the classroom cultures of students and teachers. On the other hand, linking curriculum content to students' cultural backgrounds might enhance student learning, while also enabling them to maintain a unique sense of cultural identity (Kanu 2007).

Drawing on this idea, China has made efforts to promote bilingual education and includes ethnic minority culture, history, literature, and customs in the formal curriculum of schools in minority areas (Teng and Hai 2009); however, such efforts have not been widely implemented (Wan 2004). Some Qinghai schools have authored and published their own Tibetan-language materials; however, no studies have reported the extent of their use. In other cases, trends show a decrease in schools offering minority language instruction in China (Dillon 2002). Tibetan textbooks introduced since 2001 eliminated most references to Buddhism, and in some cases Tibetan cultural references were removed from the Tibetan language curriculum altogether (Bass 2005). Attitudes and practices related to cultural content in school materials have fluctuated over time and place, and continue to do so. In 2011, Bi reported in *Xinhua* that:

Last October, concerned the Tibetan language may be sidelined in education reforms, middle school students in a number of Tibetan prefectures took to the streets in a peaceful protest.

This refers to widespread discontent over a draft policy suggesting that Tibetan be suspended as a language of instruction.

Many ethnic minority individuals in China express concern that their culture is disappearing, owing in part to the perceived pervasiveness of Han culture and Chinese language (Clothey 2005, Dillon 2002). If cultural loss is a true possibility, then helping minorities assimilate more successfully to dominant cultural values through education will not alleviate such concerns.

This issue becomes more profound when considered within the context of globalization. Three perspectives on globalization, as identified by Held and McGrew (2011), are helpful in illustrating the emerging tensions between local, national, and global interests: hyperglobalist, skeptical, and transformationalist. From the hyperglobalist perspective, "the existence of a single global economy transcending and integrating the world's major economic regions" results in the spread of a common world culture through a global marketplace (Held and McGrew 2011).

The skeptical approach sees globalization as leading not to one world culture, but to greater fragmentation and polarization between cultures (Crossley and Watson 2003), perpetuating the marginalization of poorer nations and groups. Both the hyperglobalist and skeptical approach position local and national interests as helpless amid the inevitable forces of globalization.

In contrast, the transformationalist view suggests that globalization is symbiotic and dialogic, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by external forces. According to Jor (2004:121):

global processes like the travel industry, free trade, migration, diaspora, inter-marriage, cultural hybridization and cultural exchange have transformed people's identity...

From this perspective, globalization requires actors to adapt in ways that allow them to engage more effectively with external forces (Crossley and Watson 2003:55). At the same time, it fosters the

development of new identities that are, "engaged in local contexts and responsive to transnational processes" (Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard 2004:3). Education can facilitate this transformation by fostering in students an understanding of the forces of change and providing the skills to turn such forces to their advantage (Fuller, cited in Jor 2004:118).

## METHODOLOGY

This paper addresses the concerns noted above about educating minority communities, especially from rural areas, by focusing on a case study of an English language curriculum that was specifically designed for Tibetan-speaking students. Data for this study are based on three field visits to the program's host institution and the surrounding region between 2001 and 2006, as well as classroom observations conducted during the visits. A description of the ELP from 2007-2012 was provided by the second author, who has taught in the program since 2006. The data were further supplemented by a content analysis of curriculum materials utilized by the program. In-depth, open-ended interviews with four of the program's English teachers and fifteen Tibetan graduates of the program were also conducted between April 2005 and February 2006. Interviews with instructors were designed to elicit the program's teaching philosophy and explicit or implicit purpose. Interviews with graduates were designed to elicit background information about the program's students, the implicit curriculum, and the program's outcomes for individuals. Interviewees were located in China, the US, and Europe. Interviews were conducted face-to-face when possible, and by Skype and telephone. Follow-up questions were conducted via email correspondence. Notes on each interview were taken by hand and later analyzed for common themes using an ongoing process of continuing reflection about the data, as suggested by Creswell (2003). Common themes generated from the interviews were also compared with English language texts utilized by the program. Additional data came from a 2010 ELP survey that was designed by ELP administrators and administered to 121 bachelor's level students in

March and April 2010. ELP staff collated and analyzed the data, aiming to gather information on student demographics, education, experience, language, and family circumstances.

## THE PROGRAM

### Location and Student Body

The ELP curriculum evolved within the context of combined tensions between global forces, Chinese national education policy, local minority communities, and poverty. Initiated by Westerners and local Tibetans, and in its early years funded mostly through foreign investment, this program at one of Qinghai's key universities is designed primarily for Tibetan speaking students, but also includes students of other ethnicities. China's largest and least populated province, Qinghai is a multi-ethnic region with Tibetans, Hui, Tu, Salar, Mongolians and other ethnic minorities making up around forty-seven percent of its population. The other fifty-three percent is Han Chinese (Qinghai Province Bureau of Statistics 2010). Approximately ninety-six percent of Qinghai's landmass consists of ethnic minority autonomous counties. About seventy-five percent of the ELP student population is from Qinghai (ELP Survey 2010).

English Language Program students are recruited from the four provinces with high concentrations of Tibetans (Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan) and the Tibet Autonomous Region, where the educational levels are among the nation's lowest. As an indicator, participation in secondary education in the Tibet Autonomous Region was the lowest in the country in 2006 (Wang 2011).

Before 2007, students were selected based on a combination of academic excellence, peer and teacher recommendations, and face-to-face interviews, and their tuition, room, and board for a two-or three-year preparatory program (*zhongzhuan*) were fully supported. This preparatory program, affiliated with the university, began in 1997 and the last class graduated in 2009. A two-year diploma course (*dazhuan*) was offered from 2000 with the final group graduating in 2010, and a two-year adult bachelor's degree course (*chengren benke*)

was held from 2003 until 2006. Though situated on the university campus, ELP managed these programs with considerable independence, as well as sourcing teacher salaries and student costs. The ELP was fully absorbed into the university in 2007, and began offering only the current four-year English-Tibetan bachelor's degree course (*putong benke*). Recruitment for this class is based on applicants' College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*) scores and in some cases, their completion of a preparatory year of study (*yuke*). Most students' families now support tuition and living costs, though some scholarships are available from the university, through national scholarship schemes,<sup>8</sup> and from private donors.

The majority of students are from rural areas where a variety of development needs remain, including fuel scarcity, and lack of reliable, potable water supplies. Until the late 1990s, few of the students had any background learning English prior to enrolling in the program, nor would they likely have encountered a native English speaker. The site of the ELP curriculum thus provides a compelling backdrop from which to observe the merging of competing local, national, and global interests.

## The Formal Curriculum

Chinese state-directed education builds on a longstanding historical tradition of students silently absorbing instruction and learning by rote (Cheng 2011, Platt 2004). Platt (2004:9), for example, describes the Grammar-Translation method of learning English, utilized in much of China, as a system in which:

grammar is emphasized and taught deductively through the study of rules, vocabulary selection is based on texts used and reading and writing are the major focus.

However, the influence of global initiatives in English language learning led China's State Education Commission (SEdC, now the

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Encouragement Scholarships supported by central and local governments have been offered to ELP students in the four-year BA program.

Ministry of Education) to encourage more innovative teaching strategies since 1986, allowing more local autonomy in curriculum development (Adamson 2004). This policy and later English curriculum reforms by the Ministry of Education (Cheng 2011) opened a space for some curricular developments in English language learning in Qinghai and elsewhere.

Instruction in the program is provided by foreign and local teachers, some of whom graduated from the ELP and then studied abroad. The first two years of the program's English curriculum aim to build students' foundations in the English language. The subsequent years focus on English language content classes such as sociology, anthropology, literature, academic writing, and history,<sup>9</sup> as well as an introduction to English teaching methodology. The current four-year bachelor's degree course requires students to complete a thesis based on original research with topics commonly focusing on education, language learning, and culture in the students' home communities. Students also complete a teaching internship in a rural school.

Students have between twenty-four and thirty hours of instruction weekly during the first two years, including between six and fourteen hours of English language instruction from both foreign and local teachers. Students are expected to begin communicating in English shortly after they commence their studies. In addition to English, students also take courses in Chinese and Tibetan languages, and other subjects (Stuart and Wang 2003). The emphasis on English instruction in the ELP is unlike most other university English majors in China, which may provide students with one or two hours a week of English conversation with a foreign teacher as a supplement to the grammar and writing classes taught by local teachers (Platt 2004). In the later years of the four-year bachelor's degree program, students study English from sixteen to twenty-two hours per week.

Although the ELP employs foreign and internationally-trained local teachers, it makes a conscious effort to draw from the knowledge and experience of the Tibetan student body. For example, while most State-produced English language learning materials in

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<sup>9</sup> This list is not exhaustive; students may study more than eight English language content classes over the course of their degrees.

China are written in English with Chinese explanations, one foreign teacher of the program noted that a series of English teaching materials, providing texts in both English and Tibetan, had been especially developed in order to, "better teach students English in ways that were linguistically and culturally appropriate." These texts feature English lessons with explanations in Tibetan, with Tibetan names for places and people in culturally familiar locations.<sup>10</sup> Recent initiatives to provide beginning students with culturally familiar materials include locally-made video lessons<sup>11</sup> and peer-generated texts.<sup>12</sup>

A more advanced set of curricular materials is written entirely in English, but many of them also have a specific Tibetan cultural focus. The texts include simplified and non-simplified English stories, as well as autobiographies and ethnographic texts written in English by Tibetans (often by students or graduates),<sup>13</sup> as well as a novel written by a former student that is based on memories of what his grandfather told him. Because these texts are written by and about Tibetans, they describe experiences in English that are culturally relevant to the students who read them. Names of characters in the books, their occupations, the food they eat, and their daily life experiences enable students to learn a new language through familiar means. An excerpt from one of the texts illuminates this point (Gonpo Sayrung et al. 2005:12):

I had a sheepskin robe and no matter if the weather was hot or cold, it never left my back until I was six... My uncle had softened the sheepskins with yak brains and butter, so it smelt strong under the sunshine. In my home area, sheepskin robes were ubiquitous as there was no artificial fleece.

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<sup>10</sup> Some of these texts may be downloaded at <http://www.archive.org/details/ElementaryEnglishAbctibetanAndChineseTranslations>, accessed 2 February 2011.

<sup>11</sup> For examples of locally-produced English lessons, see [www.soku.com/search\\_video/q\\_Libenhappy](http://www.soku.com/search_video/q_Libenhappy), accessed 28 June 2012.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, third year students create texts for first and second year classes.

<sup>13</sup> Some examples of such texts are available at [www.plateauculture.org/asian-highlands-perspectives](http://www.plateauculture.org/asian-highlands-perspectives), accessed 28 June 2012.



Content-based courses also emphasize local applications of materials. For example, students in an ethnography class may read locally-authored research papers before undertaking their own ethnographic research.

In sum, the formal curriculum explicitly aims to build students' foundation in English through culturally familiar course materials. Meanwhile, students are required by the host institution to take Chinese language coursework that provides a base for national awareness, and the Tibetan language, which connects students to the local context as well. The program's curriculum thus combines local, national, and international content through a combination of coursework in English, Tibetan, and Chinese.

### Informal and Implicit Curriculum

Giroux (1983) suggests that unstated norms, values, and beliefs are embedded in texts, courses and pedagogy, and are also implicitly transmitted to students by teachers. In an English Language Preparatory Program developed for Tibetan ethnic minority students, housed within a Chinese university, and taught primarily by western and internationally-trained teachers, what values or beliefs might be implicitly conveyed through the curriculum?

Classroom observations revealed that the program's teachers utilize a learner-centered approach, whereby students are asked to think critically about texts and ideas. Teachers seek and encourage students' opinions and expect them to actively engage in classroom activities. This approach differs greatly from the traditional teacher-centered educational methods and rote memorization widely practiced in Chinese state schools, including Tibetan minority secondary schools. As one former student explained (Interview, 16 November 2006):

Students [in China] are not designed [sic] to ask questions or be critical toward things they learn. Whatever is in the book, whatever the teacher says, is right. I was nourished in the same way. It automatically made me think nothing about the other

people. I just thought everyone [in the worlds]'s situation was like mine.

All of the graduates interviewed noted being taught critical thinking skills, something they had not encountered prior to entering the program. These views concur with those of ELP students interviewed by de Heering (2006). It is clear from the comments of one graduate that she also perceived an implicit message from the pedagogical style of her teacher (Interview, 16 November 2006):

As a student [before studying in the ELP] I was taught unwritten rules that makes [sic] you not speak in class – like a cultural ideology. But in my English classes [our teacher] always asked, "What do you think about it? What do you like about the writer? What do you not like about the writer?" It is very challenging to think in that way. [Previously,] everything was always good – if the book said it. Gradually, step by step, I got used to this [new] education system—I began to think about the right of all human beings to their voice...[Our] teachers inspired us to think [that] what is important is what we think.

In addition to an alternative instructional approach, non-formal learning activities outside of the classroom are also important for ELP students, and are a space where implicit values are conveyed. For example, students are encouraged to further develop their English language skills by doing research projects in their home communities. Supplemental to the formal curricular aspects already described (such as ethnographic research projects for their bachelor's degree and research for generating English teaching materials), a number of students become involved with an extra-curricular folklore project. To conduct this project, students interview people from their home communities, collecting local folklore. Afterwards, the students transcribe the stories and translate them into English.

Another example of an extra-curricular learning experience is recording endangered music. In this example, a student learns how to use recording equipment before going home to collect songs by local singers. They then make DVDs of their songs and photographs to disseminate to their communities. A local organization, the Plateau Cultural Heritage Protection group, facilitates these activities. Such

activities explicitly aim to improve students' English and technical literacy, and to support local cultures by generating cultural products for community use.

These projects also implicitly encourage students to learn more about their home communities, traditions, and customs in a contemporary context where there are few options to receive formal education about these things. Some teachers have helped a number of students to independently publish their written work and media projects in English and/ or local languages. In this way, the students are encouraged to document and preserve local folklore, amid a sea of rapid change due to modernization and globalization. While these goals are not explicitly identified in the curriculum, interviewees regularly commented on the importance of these projects in helping them to learn about and maintain their culture, heritage, and traditions.

ELP teachers also encourage students to utilize their English language skills to join local organizations, write proposals, and seek funding for these cultural heritage projects,<sup>14</sup> and also for grassroots education and development projects. To initiate development projects in their home communities, students seek input from locals on the problems and issues that are most pressing prior to seeking funding. A number of students then write and submit grant proposals to various local and international organizations to generate funding for such community-driven projects. Small scale projects have included renovation and repairs of temples, installation of solar cookers and solar electricity in rural areas, irrigation projects, improvement of schools, and education projects,<sup>15</sup> to name a few. Certain students who successfully sought funding for development

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<sup>14</sup> Two examples of cultural heritage preservation projects undertaken by program graduates may be viewed at <http://www.archive.org/details/XunhuaTibetanFolkCultureTheVideoCollection2010> and <http://www.archive.org/details/LenyiTibetanVillagePartOne>, both accessed 2 February 2011.

<sup>15</sup> In 2010, twenty-nine percent of English Language Program students had at some time undertaken culture documentation projects, fifteen percent had completed grass-roots development projects in their communities, and fifty-nine percent had voluntarily taught in their communities (ELP Survey 2010).

projects later established non-profit organizations in order to continue doing such work within Tibetan areas of China. These examples suggest that community work is also among the values implicitly conveyed by the program.

## DISCUSSION

Denzin and Lincoln (2008:6) note that culturally responsive research practices, whereby what is "acceptable and not acceptable research is determined and defined from within the community," locates power within the indigenous community and encourages self-determination and empowerment. The informal curriculum of the ELP, that encourages students to seek cultural preservation and development project ideas from their home community, provides a means of empowerment not explicitly conveyed through the English language curriculum. However, this idea is new in most communities. As one former student explained (Interview, 26 November 2006):

I went to local families and asked them, "What is the biggest problem in our community?" Many people laughed at me. They thought I was such an innocent child who thought someone would give us money for free.

Furthermore, while the project proposals are initiated by Tibetan students and are a direct response to their communities' needs, international donors are the primary funding source. Therefore, although the community-driven projects may facilitate a sense of empowerment as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggest, they may also maintain communities' dependency on global forces outside of their control. Foreign donations may also come with conditions or with their own set of values attached, and these may also not align with local or national interests. Indeed, the program has been scrutinized due to concerns that the curriculum may diverge from state-sanctioned discourse. As noted, students also indicated they were introducing new ideas into their own communities, suggesting that the impact of the program reaches beyond its prescribed set of courses.

At the same time, while English language professionals have argued that language can be taught in a culturally neutral manner, there is much discussion in the literature about English as a language of cultural transmission (Tam and Weiss 2004). The new type of thinking described by ELP students suggests that the program's curriculum extends beyond merely an appreciation for Tibetan cultural values, but that some acceptance of western ways of thinking may be implicitly conveyed.

For this reason, Held and McGrew's (2011) "transformationalist perspective" on globalization, described in this paper, is perhaps the most applicable. ELP students have fostered new identities that are "engaged in local contexts," but that also respond to the transnational processes of globalization, including the increase of native English speakers in their educational communities. While the new landscape created by globalization processes also requires an ability to adapt to new demands, a transformationalist perspective suggests that these Tibetan students may be able to do this successfully as a result of new identities developed through ELP coursework.

## CONCLUSION

Globalization has placed new demands on local communities, but also can facilitate the development of a space where local communities can benefit from resources not previously available, with the appropriate tools. In this case, national curricular reforms in China that were initiated in response to global influences coincided with China's opening to foreign investment and foreign teachers. These events, in turn, provided that 'space' by enabling an unusual English language program to emerge at the local level. As graduates of the program stated, their ability to speak English and think critically provided tools that led to considering new possibilities, and which enabled them to bring benefit to their communities. Ultimately, however, their 'success' in the new market economy requires that they utilize these tools to negotiate the multiple demands of competing local, national, and global interests.

Furthermore, as noted by Jor (2004), success amid the global forces of change depends on individuals seizing opportunities for change where change is needed. For such change to occur, it must also be possible within the existing social structure. While globalization has made the ELP as it currently exists possible, a shifting tide could also bring new challenges that may also need to be negotiated.

Finally, it is ironic that although the ELP implicitly conveys the idea that students may individually take action to contribute to and improve their own communities, some program activities and the resulting development projects may depend on the support of international donors or foreign teachers. The transition to a student-funded bachelor's degree program, a higher proportion of local teachers, and greater local support for projects have reduced this dependency to some extent. Nevertheless, while globalization has created the space in which the ELP can exist and thrive, its sustainability also requires sustained local and/ or national support. Only time will tell whether this will be a reality.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Beijing 北京  
*chengren benke* 成人本科  
Chongqing 重庆  
*dazhuan* 大专  
*gaige kaifang* 改革开放  
Gansu 甘肃  
*gaokao* 高考  
Guangxi 广西  
Guangzhou 广州  
Guizhou 贵州  
Han 汉  
Hui 回  
Jiunian yiwu jiaoyu 九年义务教育  
Li Yang 李阳  
Ningxia 宁夏  
*putong benke* 普通本科  
Putonghua 普通话  
Qinghai 青海  
RMB (Renminbi) 人民币  
Salar (Sala) 撒拉  
Shaanxi 陕西  
Shanghai 上海  
Sichuan 四川  
Tu 土  
Xibu da kaifa 西部大开发  
Xinhua 新华  
Youhui zhengce 优惠政策  
*yuke* 预科  
Yunnan 云南  
*zhongzhuan* 中专

AN A MDO TIBETAN PASTORALIST FAMILY'S LO SAR  
IN STONG SKOR VILLAGE

Timothy Thurston (The Ohio State University) and  
Tsering Samdrup (Duke University)

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a single family's preparations and celebrations for the 2010 Tibetan Lo sar 'New Year' in Stong skor Village, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, PR China. It then compares the findings with other studies of Lo sar practices, and calls for more descriptive areal studies.

KEYWORDS

Lo sar, Mang ra, pastoral life, social and cultural change

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

*Lo sar* 'New Year',<sup>2</sup> is an important and highly anticipated part of the lunar calendar across the Tibetan Plateau. It is a time for visitation, eating, and spending time with family. It is also a time when such major lifecycle events as birthdays<sup>3</sup> and weddings are celebrated. As such, the Tibetan New Year period and the associated preparations are a rich repository of local folk practices and beliefs. Remarkably, however, a number of articles about *Lo sar* practices generalize about Tibetan practices regardless of differences across even small geographic areas and mostly focus on festival customs in agricultural areas (Duncan 1964, Tsepak Rigzin 2003, Tsering Bum et al. 2008, Dpal ldan bkra shis and Stuart 2009). Furthermore, although some scholars have recently begun to draw a distinction between pastoral and agricultural festival practices (Tshe brtan rgyal 2010 and Gcan tsha bkra b+ho 2011), their work tends to be prescriptive, providing – almost in list form – brief descriptions of general practices that pastoral or agricultural communities observe as part of their *Lo sar* traditions.

While the general practices described in many of these studies discuss practices found across a number of regions (Tshe brtan rgyal 2010 and Gcan tsha bkra b+ho 2011), it is in details that differences emerge, providing significant insight into fundamental differences between the lives of Tibetan farmers and herders, and shedding light on the strong influence of government policies on the fabric of Tibetan life. Details also show how certain traditionally accepted social divisions employed by anthropologists inadequately describe

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<sup>2</sup> Most areas of A mdo follow the Chinese lunar calendar (known locally as the *nong li* 'agricultural calendar'), and often refer to the Julian New Year as *rgya lo* 'the Chinese calendar'. Many areas of Khams and Dbus gtsang use the Tibetan calendar set by astrologers in Lhasa. In 2010, both calendars set the New Year on 14 February.

<sup>3</sup> Birthdays are not annual celebrations. Age in Stong skor Village is counted with the passing of each *Lo sar*, and only major landmarks are celebrated, particularly for the third and eightieth years.

the diversity of practices within these same areas. This article advocates a localized and descriptive ethnography, cognizant of the unique confluences of historical, political, and social factors that continue to affect traditions and daily lives.<sup>4</sup> We recognize that, since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, pastoral and agricultural dialectics, and even regional distinctions, are insufficient for understanding Tibetan cultural variation in the early twenty-first century. In the case of Stong skor Village, certain key factors include, but are not limited to, the area's traditional herding economic base, the political upheaval of the last sixty years, and historical migration patterns.

We describe a Buddhist family's Lo sar in a predominantly Bon village<sup>5</sup> by detailing the village's history and the family's daily routine for household work, Lo sar preparations, the actual day of Lo sar, and describing the events of the first fifteen days. In doing so, we address issues of social change in the A mdo Tibetan cultural region,<sup>6</sup> and ultimately confront the ways in which the nuances of Tibetan culture are often overlooked in scholarly contexts. A secondary goal is to continue the work already begun by Tsering Bum et al. (2008), and contribute to an increasing body of literature problematizing scholarship that focuses on cultural generalizations for Tibetans living across an enormous geographic area, engaged in vastly differing lifestyles and in some cases, practicing different religions as well (Rin chen rdo rje and Stuart 2009:250).

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the internal diversity of the Tibetan Plateau area, see Roche et al. (2010) and Makley (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Bon is a religious tradition in Tibet with ostensibly pre-Buddhist influences, although its current practice shows many similarities with Tibetan Buddhism (Tucci 1980:213-248 and Kvaerne 1995).

<sup>6</sup> A mdo is one of three major Tibetan cultural regions and refers to northern and northeastern Tibetan regions of China. Dbus gtsang refers to most of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), while Khams is composed of eastern Tibetan regions in China including the Chab mdo Region of the TAR, as well as parts of Sichuan, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces.

## INTRODUCTION TO STONG SKOR VILLAGE

Stong skor Village is a cluster of natural villages in the proximity of Mgo mang (Ch: Guomaying) Township, Mang ra (Ch: Guinan) County,<sup>7</sup> Mtsho lho (Ch: Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Ch: Qinghai) Province. It is located west of the township town and south of a desert of rolling dunes, and is accessed by a forty-minute car ride on mostly unpaved roads. The village is composed entirely of Tibetans, although several Han Chinese villages are interspersed throughout the area. Hui Muslims also live in many Tibetan areas, but there are none in Stong skor and only a few in the whole of Mgo mang Township.

Stong skor Village contains six herding *tsho ba* 'clans' originally from a region known as Stong che in present-day Khri ka (Ch: Guide) County, to the east of Mang ra. Stong che is historically a stronghold of the Bon religion (Tsering Thar 2008). Five of Stong skor's six *tsho ba* follow Bon; only the U Sin Clan practices Buddhism. The name U Sin is Mongol, and refers to the place where the original two families of the clan lived. The six clans of the 'Brog ru 'Nomad Tribe' migrated from the Stong che area over 200 years ago, and, according to local informants, eventually arrived in present-day Stong skor.

Mongols previously inhabited the area in which the present-day village of Stong skor is located; to this date, many local toponyms are Mongol and not Tibetan.<sup>8</sup> Although the Mongols had already left prior to the arrival of the Stong skor villagers' descendants and are not part of the village's experience, local elders in nearby villages continue to tell stories of conflicts with Mongols. Bands of Kazakh thieves fleeing persecution in Xinjiang roamed the area as recently as the mid-twentieth century, but have also since left.

After Stong skor came under the control of the central government in the late 1950s, the land on which Stong skor was located became part of a large military horse-breeding farm. Never a

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<sup>7</sup> The official county name is Kos nan, a transliteration of the Chinese term 'Guinan'. In this article, the locally preferred toponym Mang ra is used.

<sup>8</sup> See Janhunen 2011 for more on Mongol toponyms in Tibetan areas (particularly Mang ra County).



part of the Mgo mang or Mang ra County government lands, it has more recently become a part of the Guinan caoye kaifa youxian zeren gongsi 'The Guinan Grassland Development Limited Liability Corporation'. In 2000, the company began reforestation work to combat desertification. In 2010, the company rented land from the village on an annual basis, and also employed a number of locals for salaried reforestation work.

The name of the adjacent township, Mgo mang 'many heads', refers to the numerous springs in the area, a reason why the area was chosen as a breeding ground for military horses. This, in turn, encouraged the government to relocate many Han Chinese families to the area. The children and grandchildren of these original Han Chinese immigrants now live in villages named after the horse teams (Ch: *ma dui*) who originally worked there. Six such villages are now interspersed within the Stong skor Village territory. There are a total of eleven *ma dui* within the corporation's district.

During the mid-1990s, grassland privatization policies drastically altered the fabric of daily life in Stong skor.<sup>9</sup> Prior to this time, people lived in black yak-hair tents (T: *sbra nag*) throughout the year. Villagers now live in these traditional dwellings only during the year's four warmest months. During other months, they live in houses made of packed earth walls. Electricity reached these areas during the 1990s in the form of solar generators; power lines reached the area in 2008.

In 2010, Stong skor villagers lived in adobe houses in yards enclosed by walls approximately three meters high made of the same material. Most rooms in the house had concrete or brick floors, and the main rooms often had both a metal dung-burning stove and a *hedzee*.<sup>10</sup> Most houses had a television placed opposite the *hedzee*.

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<sup>9</sup> For a more systematic discussion of the changes implemented in Qinghai, with specific reference to Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and their accompanying environmental impacts, see Goldstein and Beall (2002:131-150). For a discussion of other areas of Qinghai, including grassland policy in Mang ra, see Mgon po tshe ring (2012).

<sup>10</sup> *Hedzee* is a colloquial term corresponding to the Chinese *kang*, the sleeping platform in the main room of a Tibetan fixed-dwelling home. Smoke is funneled beneath the platform from a stove before leaving the home, heating the platform in the winter.

Almost every Stong skor family subsisted by herding. Most men also worked for the local reforestation company during the summer but were free during the winter months. Salaries were over 1,000 RMB/ month, including the winter months. Additionally, every villager received a portion of the money that the company paid to the village as compensation for the communal grazing land that the company used. There was little out-migration because of this income, and few villagers (if any) relied on migrant labor to supplement their income.

The influx of many modern conveniences and the construction of fixed dwellings has changed traditional ways of obtaining wealth as people have responded to privatization and the opportunities provided in the Tibetan Plateau's new economy (Goldstein et al. 2008 and Bauer et al. 2010). In what was once all communal grassland, every family has been allotted a parcel of land based on family size. This family land has become winter pasture and the village's remaining lands are now communal summer pasture.

Winter pastures are now all fenced.<sup>11</sup> With limitations on land, families have sold many of their less profitable animals such as goats and yaks in order to maximize their allotted space. Herd sizes are reported to be less than one-third of their size prior to privatization. Whereas herd sizes were once used to judge family wealth, families now evaluate wealth in relation to income based on the salaries many villagers currently derive from the re-forestation company.

Finally, the privatization of previously public grassland has seen an increasing emphasis on education. Since families frequently lack the land to continuously divide their holdings evenly between their children, children are being encouraged to concentrate on their studies, with the ultimate aim of obtaining a lifetime, government job with a regular salary, which is seen as an additional way of ensuring their future livelihoods in the face of land restrictions.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on grassland privatization and enclosure movements in Guinan, see Mgon po tshe ring (2012).

WINTER LIFE IN STONG SKOR PRIOR TO LO SAR

Throughout January and February of 2010, we lived in the home of Mkhar 'bum rgyal (b. 1980), his wife Ko la (b. 1977), and their three children – Tshe dbang skyid (b. 1998), Nor bu 'bum (b. 1999), and Dka' thub tshe ring (b. 2000), where we observed the daily routine of winter life, and preparations for Lo sar and related festivities. Prior to the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month, and throughout the preparations for the New Year and the New Year period itself, Stong skor villagers engage in various herding activities. This section describes the family's winter routine framing the Lo sar period, providing insight into the division of labor and different people's roles.

During the winter, the day generally began between six-thirty and seven a.m. when Ko la got up, turned on the home's electric lights, made a fire in the main stove, and swept the floor. Afterwards, she poured fresh water into copper bowls, lit the butter lamps in front of the *mchod khang* 'family shrine', and set out offering bowls of fresh water; performed 108 prostrations in front of the shrine; and washed her face, hands, and occasionally her hair. Following this, she woke her daughter and later the sons. Finally she roused her husband, and (in our case) guests.

Between eight-thirty and nine o'clock, Ko la prepared a breakfast of *ja bsus*, made of *rtsam pa*,<sup>12</sup> butter, cheese, and milk tea. People drank most of the milk tea and mixed the powdered ingredients into a paste with their ring fingers. They then scooped the paste into their mouths with their ring finger. After they finished eating, an additional cup of tea was often drunk with bread. People generally ate homemade bread that was either baked outside the home in piles of smoldering ash or fried in canola oil. As the New Year neared, and throughout the New Year period, special red bread (see below) was served in its place. Bread that had begun to go stale was often dipped in milk tea before it was eaten.

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<sup>12</sup> *Rtsam pa* may refer to both roasted barley flour and the dough made from kneading barley flour, hot tea, butter, and dried cheese. Occasionally sugar and other ingredients may be added.

Everyone helped with the morning herding after breakfast. The rams were sent to the proper pasture: prior to the New Year, they were sent to pasture on the same side of the road bisecting the family's land as the house; after the New Year, they were sent across the road with the ewes where there was better grass. In 2010, the family had approximately 150 rams, 120 ewes, seventy lambs, sixteen cows, one *mdzo mo* (a female, yak-cow hybrid), three horses, and two dozen goats.

Ewes give birth in winter, and the herd had many weak mothers and newborns during this period, which were separated from the flock with their young early in the morning and fed a mixture of hay and canola seeds. The remaining ewes and goats were sent out to pasture without receiving fodder. The cows were then milked and, afterwards, hay was put out for them to eat during the day. Families that owned horses also put out hay for them, and children then fed hay to the cows and *mdzo mo*. Once every three days, all sheep were driven to a spring located approximately three kilometers away, called Mo khor, a Mongol name that locals say refers to a valley originating in a cliff or other steep declivity. About four hours is required for a round trip. Cows went to a well at one of the nearby *ma dui* villages for water every other day. If the family did not need water at that time, the cows were allowed to go of their own accord. Either Ko la or one of the children drove them back in the afternoon. These activities constituted the household's morning routine during winter.

Following the morning's herding, it was common for village men to gather in one of the Chinese villages and play mahjong (Ch: *majiang*, T: *ma cAng*), a locally popular card game similar to *teen patti*, or billiards. Many men also drank alcohol during this time. Drinks of choice included Yellow River Barley-flavored Beer (Ch: *Huang he qingke pijiu*), and a clear liquor distilled from barley or sorghum, depending on its origin, and locally referred to as either *chang* (in Tibetan) or *lajiu* (in Qinghai dialect). The most popular and cheapest drinks are sorghum-based liquors distilled in Sichuan Province, including *Liu fu ren jia*, which cost twelve to eighteen RMB per bottle in 2010.

The government recently had begun cracking down on gambling, making occasional raids and imposing fines of 500–1,000 RMB. Any gambling done in the open (largely the billiards) was done without money publicly exchanging hands. Instead, a system whereby playing cards were used like casino chips in lieu of money was created to elude officials.

While her children played in the pastures and kept watch for foxes that might attack weaker herd members, Ko la fetched water from one of the local *ma dui*, washed and mended clothing, prepared food, repaired punctured tires on the water cart, and collected dung to fuel their stove as the need arose. She had few free moments.

Stong skor's primary school taught the first and second grades. Students then went to the township town for further elementary school education. Students were on a schedule of twenty days of study and then eight days at home. Middle and senior middle school students boarded and attended classes in the county town, or in Chab cha (Ch: Gonghe), the capital of Mtsho lho Prefecture. When children returned home, their parents assigned them duties related to animal husbandry such as feeding cows and newborn lambs; birthing ewes; driving animals to Mo khor Spring, and watching animals in the pasture. In 2010, the school had a winter vacation beginning in late December and ending 4 March, after the completion of the fifteen-day Lo sar period. Students were assigned Tibetan, Chinese, and math homework to complete during the vacation.

Sheep and cows mostly returned to their enclosures of their own accord in the evening. Rams were kept in a pen that was dug into the ground, as were the bulls, whose nose-rings were tied to cords pegged to the ground. The *ma mo* 'ewes', their lambs, and the goats were kept in an aboveground enclosure with adobe walls about two meters high with a wooden gate. At around five p.m., food made from barley flour and boiling water mixed together and squeezed into pellets was prepared for the ewes, cows, and their young. Larger pellets were given to the cows, and smaller pellets were fed to the ewes. Nursing cows did not spend the night in an enclosure, but were instead given hay and stayed outside. Calves were kept in a small adobe enclosure protecting them from the cold and wind, and also

preventing them from nursing during the night, thereby ensuring that there would be milk the following morning.

Evening work was usually completed by eight p.m., and everyone went inside to watch television. The preferred programs were on the Qinghai Tibetan-language Television (T: Mtsho sngon bod skad brnyan 'phrin), and included the news, Chinese television series dubbed into the Tibetan A mdo dialect, such as *The Journey to the West* (Ch: *Xiyouji*, T: *nub phyogs su bskyod pa'i zin tho*), *The Plateau* (Ch: *Gaodi*, T: *mtho sa*), and other shows ranging from costume dramas (Ch: *guzhuang ju*) and city dramas (Ch: *dushi ju*) to programs about the Chinese Civil War and Tibetan-produced films. As the New Year drew near, and throughout the New Year period, the station re-aired previous Tibetan New Year variety shows similar to China Central Television's (CCTV) annual New Year's variety show (Ch: *Chunjie wanhui*) that has become a staple of Chinese television. These programs served to reproduce a particular image of Tibetan culture for viewers, emphasizing singing, dancing, and traditional clothing as important ethnic markers. Oftentimes, however, the television performers' clothing was radically different from what local Tibetans actually wore. Dancing of any sort – often portrayed as pan-Tibetan (Morcom 2007) – was not part of Stong skor villagers' traditional folk practice.

While men and boys watched television, women and girls prepared dinner, which generally consisted of hand-pulled square noodles (Ch: *mianpian*, T: *'then thug*) cooked in mutton or beef broth. A small amount of meat was first fried in a pan, and water was added to create the broth. The noodles were made from dough consisting of water and wheat flour that was rolled flat, coated with canola oil on both sides, and then cut into long strips. As the broth heated, the strips were flattened by hand and two or three people pulled bits off with their thumb and forefinger, flinging them directly into the broth. When guests were present, large amounts of mutton were boiled in the same broth and made available first to the guests and then to family members. Adult males and guests ate first, while children and women ate later. Lights were off and people were in bed by ten-thirty p.m. on most nights.

## LO SAR PREPARATIONS

Excitement about Lo sar began building on the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month. With only fifteen days until the New Year, children began talking about the coming event, and adults began making preparations in earnest. Many of the family's Lo sar-related food and clothing purchases had been made well in advance, and this last half-month was used for any remaining preparations.

### Cleaning

This section discusses the role of cleaning, food preparation, and religious practices in relation to creating the physical and ritual cleanliness necessary to ensure a successful New Year, and how it connects to Tibetan economies of fortune (Da Col 2007 and Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011) based on traditional ideas of purity.

While sweeping the floor was part of Ko la's daily routine, the nineteenth and twentieth days of the twelfth lunar month were reserved for cleaning the house's walls and ceiling. In 2010, Mkhar 'bum rgyal's family cleaned their home on the nineteenth. Family members moved all the furniture outside the house. The items that could not be removed were covered with cloth. Ko la then took a broom made from a yak's tail and swept the ceiling and walls. The floor was swept after the dust had settled from the ceiling. Furniture and belongings that had been moved out of the house were then dusted and put back in the house. Next, the windows were washed inside and out, and window curtains were also cleaned. We were told that windows and curtains may be washed on days other than the nineteenth and twenty-ninth.

Dirty clothing is washed prior to the New Year on days with fair weather. In 2010, the weather permitted such clothes to be washed on the sixteenth and twenty-eighth days of the twelfth lunar month. Mkhar 'bum rgyal's family owned an electric washing machine, although Ko la had to fetch extra water from the local Chinese villages on their horse-drawn water cart to supply the machine. A special trip was made specifically for this purpose. Most

modern clothes were washed in the washing machine, while Tibetan robes were washed by hand in a trough using a washboard because they were too heavy for the machine. Socks and underpants were washed by hand because they were considered impure and unfit to wash with other clothing. Clothes were then placed on drying lines in the sunniest spot of the yard.

These cleaning practices reflect the belief that everything should be new and clean for the coming New Year, including clothes. Informants suggested that in the past, men shaved their heads before the New Year to ensure that they took as little as possible from *lo rnying* 'the old year' into the new one.

## Red Bread

*Go dmar* 'red bread' is named for its reddish-brown color and is an important Lo sar food. It is considered a local delicacy, and is only made for festive occasions. In 2010, locals commonly baked bread in covered pots that were placed in piles of smoldering ash from burnt cow, sheep, or goat dung. Red bread, however, is deep-fried.

Three types of dough are used to make red bread. The first, *go re sog sog*, uses a dough made from flour, water, salt, ground prickly ash, sugar, and chives. The dough is rolled into a long, thin unbroken rope about a quarter of a centimeter in diameter, and then coated with rapeseed oil. It is then coiled so that it resembles a rope and placed on a plate. The person in charge of the frying uses chopsticks on the insides of the coils, places the dough in hot oil (see Figure One), and holds the chopsticks in the oil until the dough comes off by itself. Metal tongs are then used to remove cooked bread from the oil, and hold it over the pot to ensure excess oil drips back into the pot.

The second form of red bread is *go re bsles ma* 'braided bread'. The dough for *go re bsles ma* is made of flour, water, and sugar. It is made into two long cylinders of equal length, between half a centimeter and one centimeter in diameter. The two strips are placed cross-wise, braided together, placed in the oil, and deep-fried until reddish-brown. The dough for this bread is also used to create



*rgyal bo* 'kings', flower-shaped bread that is pierced in the middle.<sup>13</sup> *Rgyal bo* were historically made for every person in the family and also offered as gifts when visiting other families. Though *rgyal bo* are still made for individual family members, people no longer use *rgyal bo* as gifts, but instead offer tea bricks, jars of fruit (Ch: *guan tou*), and bottles of liquor.

The final type of red bread is known simply as *go re dmar ro* 'red bread'. The dough is made from flour, water, and baking soda, rolled very flat, and cut into ten-centimeter-wide rectangles. An incision is then made in the middle of the dough, and one end is folded through the slit with the final shape resembling a bowtie. These are also fried. This final type of red bread is the most common.



FIGURE 1. Sgrol ma uses chopsticks to put uncooked *go re sog sog* in oil.

Female family members collect dead wood from the communal area around Mo khor Spring several days prior to cooking red bread. Though cow and sheep dung are normally used for most

<sup>13</sup> See 'Brug mo skyid et al. (2010) for more on the use of *rgyal bo* in neighboring Khri ka County.

cooking, wood is used on this day because wood burns hotter and thus is deemed a better fuel for making red bread.

On the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth lunar month (9 February 2010), Ko la rose earlier than usual to prepare the dough. The three kinds of dough were then stored separately and covered with plastic to retain moisture. After completing their morning routines, three women from two neighbor families gathered to help prepare the large amount of red bread necessary to ensure a successful Lo sar. The three women who helped were Mkhar 'bum rgyal's mother, Sgrol ma; his sister-in-law; and a cousin. Men rarely participate in making any sort of bread, including *go re dmar ro*.

At one point during the bread-making process, children came in and made much noise, causing the oldest woman in the group – Sgrol ma – to comment on several taboos related to the making of red bread that were no longer observed. The first was that the door or tent flap should always be kept closed, no matter how hot or smoky it was inside. The second was that silence should be kept while making red-bread in fear that the noise would keep the oil from boiling, and the bread would not achieve the desired red color. A corollary to this taboo was that children were strictly forbidden from taking part in the process, as they were likely to make too much noise. Thirdly, the oil was not to be called *snum* 'oil', but *chu* 'water'. She explained that people lacked oil, and making red bread put a significant strain on the family's resources in the past. By calling it water, then, people felt they were using less of their wealth.

In total, approximately twenty-five kilograms of flour were used in this process. As the afternoon wore on, the piles of completed bread rose ever higher on a plastic sheet that had been cleaned and placed on the ground (Figure Two). When the process was nearly complete, Ko la prepared a meal of mutton, a soup made from rice-based 'glass noodles' (Ch: *fen tiao*), and freshly made red bread, which the helpers and host family then ate. On ensuing days, Ko la visited the helpers and the process was repeated at their homes.



FIGURE 2. Three different kinds of red bread are placed on a plastic sheet on the ground at the end of the day.

## Dumplings

Steamed stuffed dumplings, locally called *tshod ma*, are another common Lo sar food. While normal dumplings may be as large as a small fist and employ a variety of fillings, dumplings prepared for Lo sar should be about four centimeters in diameter and stuffed with minced mutton and chives. The wraps are made from dough composed of water and wheat flour, rolled into a long cylinder approximately three to four centimeters in diameter, and then pieces are cut off and flattened with a rolling pin. A small amount of filling is placed in the middle of the dough (Figure Three), and then the fingers are used to close the tops by pinching bits of dough together, moving in a circular motion.

Both men and women helped make these dumplings in 2010. The process was slow. Many dumplings were needed for the Lo sar period. The family worked several consecutive evenings before having enough. Children were not asked to help in Mkhar 'bum rgyal's home. The dumplings were then frozen in the family's electric freezer during

the daytime, and boiled in a soup of mutton, vegetables, and either *'then thug* or glass noodles. These are an important part of the *dgu rgyag* custom (described below) and are also served in meals throughout the Lo sar period.



FIGURE 3. Mkhar 'bum rgyal helps make New Year dumplings.

## Retreat

Mkhar 'bum rgyal's father, Lcags thar 'bum, entered into a seven-day religious retreat in his home beginning on the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month (29 January 2010). He stayed in his room reciting scriptures, spinning a prayer wheel, and meditating during this period. While in retreat, access to Lcags thar 'bum's home was restricted to family members and a few select guests. Lcags thar 'bum placed a pile of small stones outside the family's yard, one for each person who was permitted to enter the home at that time. This practice is not specifically associated with the New Year. Lcags thar 'bum performs this retreat annually, as a result of a vow he once made to a *bla ma*.

## Burning *bsang*

Conch shells echo across the grassland at around six in the evening on Lo sar eve as males of each household go to *bsang khri* 'altars' near their homes and burn *bsang*.<sup>14</sup> Although *bsang* is burned inside the family yard almost every morning, this evening's offering has added significance. The male household head burns *bsang* and pours liquor on the fire (Figure Four), then circumambulates the altar and prayer flags, chanting and throwing *rlung rta* 'wind horses' high into the night sky.<sup>15</sup> He, or another male family member, then blows a conch shell several times. Children gather several meters away around a piece of smoldering dung taken from the original sacrificial fire and use it to light fireworks. This continues each night for about a week into the New Year, although families who own racehorses may also perform this ritual the day before a race in the hope of receiving the deities' favor.

On the twenty-ninth day of the twelfth lunar month (12 February 2010), a big meal consisting of soup made with Lo sar dumplings was enjoyed. The twenty-ninth is a day for eating one's fill. As in other Tibetan areas there is a tale suggesting that Gshin rje chos rgyal, the Lord of Death and King of Dmyal ba<sup>16</sup> comes and weighs every person. A heavier weight is said to reflect or ensure good fortune in the coming year.<sup>17</sup> While some areas, including A mdo County in the Tibet Autonomous Region's Nagchu Prefecture (Wan de khar 2002-3:92), eat a special dish on this day called *dgu thug*, Stong skor residents do not eat such noodles, instead believing that it is most important to eat a very good meal on the evening of the twenty-ninth and be very full.

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<sup>14</sup> *Bsang* is "fumigation using aromatic and perfumed herbs" (Tucci 1980:200). Most fumigation in Stong skor involves juniper but, prior to and during Lo sar, Stong skor residents also offer alcohol and barley flour to deities.

<sup>15</sup> A *rlung rta* 'wind horse' is a small square piece of paper with a picture of a horse bearing a wish-fulfilling gem printed in the center, and a tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon in the four corners.

<sup>16</sup> Dmyal ba = the hell realm of the Lord of Death.

<sup>17</sup> The best published source on this that we have located is Tsering Bum (2007).



FIGURE 4. Mkhar 'bum rgyal burns *bsang* and pours liquor (Tib: *chab chang*) on the fire.

### Lo sar Eve

Although most of Lo sar eve was devoted to the herding tasks that characterize daily life in the village, several activities and taboos mark the day. One such tradition involves cleanliness. Women should not wash their hair on Lo sar Eve, although washing is acceptable for men. Nonetheless, this taboo appears subordinate to the idea that all should be clean for the New Year. In 2010, twelve-year-old Tshe dbang skyid did not wash her hair on the twenty-ninth day, and thus had to do this on the morning of the thirtieth, which earned her a scolding but, as she was a child, her offense was treated lightly.

At six-thirty p.m., while Ko la was putting animals into their pens and feeding the female livestock, Mkhar 'bum rgyal, the children, and the authors ascended the hill behind the house to offer *bsang* in the same fashion as the night before. Prayers were again recited, incense lit, fireworks ignited, a conch shell blown, and offerings made to a variety of deities to ensure prosperity, luck, and safety during the Lo sar period and the coming year.

The focal point of the evening was the New Year's Television program. Rather than the Chinese language Chunjie wanhui central to the New Year's Eve activities in many Han areas, Stong skor villagers watched the Tibetan language counterpart pre-recorded and aired by the Qinghai Tibetan-Language Television Station. The variety show included emcees from each of the three major Tibetan cultural and dialect regions of A mdo, Khams, and Dbus gtsang, and featured songs, dances, and comedy performances from such famous Tibetan performers as Sman bla skyabs and Kun dga'.

#### LO SAR TSHES GCIG 'NEW YEAR'S DAY'

The first day of Lo sar in Stong skor is traditionally a day of visiting family and friends. In 2010, after the conclusion of the Qinghai Tibetan-Language Television Station's New Year's program, most people went to bed at around ten-thirty p.m. hoping for a few hours' rest (though some did not sleep at all), and then got up at around two a.m. to arrange the food they had prepared, the candies and fruits they had bought, and to don their new clothing in preparation for visiting and receiving visitors. In addition to food that was set out for guests, the best candies, apples, and bread were placed on plates in front of the altar as offerings to the deities. A *thang ka*<sup>18</sup> painting was hung above the *hedzee* with offerings on a plate underneath the painting. Mkhar 'bum rgyal also offered *bsang* outside, and fireworks purchased in Mgo mang Township Town were set off. These included strings of small firecrackers, cone shaped fountains, and small rockets. Families did not spend more than 100 RMB on fireworks in 2010, but this amount has increased in recent years.

The first visitors to the home arrived at around three-twenty a.m. and were offered food, candies, and alcohol. The family poured the first three cups of alcohol directly onto the hot stove as an offering to Thab lha 'Hearth Deity'. Food and alcohol were then offered to the guests. Most guests chatted for a short while, ate a bit, and then left for other homes. During this time and throughout much

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<sup>18</sup> *Thang ka* are "Tibetan religious scroll paintings" (Kunsang 2004:1140) frequently featuring a deity in the center.

of the remaining Lo sar period, food was eaten with disposable chopsticks, which allowed hosts and hostesses to spend time serving food and talking, and decreased the amount of time needed to wash re-usable chopsticks.

Children visited neighboring homes after daybreak, calling, "*Lo sar bzang!* Happy New Year!" before entering. Each family offered them food and tea and, when they left, gave them candy and money (usually five *yuan* per child). Adults also visited neighbors during this time. Men generally visited on the morning of the first day, while women stayed home to entertain guests.

That first evening was mainly for visiting family and clan members. After daybreak on the first day of Lo sar, visiting continued, and people went to other villages to visit family and friends. The second and third days of the period were times when women visited neighbors after serving as hostesses on the first day.

## Taboos

The first day of Lo sar was formerly associated with several taboos related to individual behavior, however, most such taboos are now only a memory. For example, if an animal died on Lo sar, it was said to be sleeping rather than dead. Additionally, as recently as the 1990's, young children were told not to fight, cry, or do or say anything bad on Lo sar because such actions on New Year's Day would set the tone for the coming year.

Various folk beliefs related to the environment are connected to the weather on the first day of Lo sar. Snow is considered especially auspicious, as reflected in a local saying, *mgron po lam dkar* 'guests with a white road ahead', suggesting auspiciousness associated with snowfall and visiting during the New Year period. The color white symbolizes an auspicious offering in the same way a snow-white *kha btags* is the best way to receive a guest. The Iron



Tiger Year's New Year's Day in Stong skor was clear and sunny,<sup>19</sup> and was considered neither auspicious nor inauspicious.

## Birthdays

Tibetans do not necessarily record their birth date. Instead, a person is considered to be one year old on the day of their birth. At the passing of their first Lo sar, children are considered to be two years old. Following that, they add a year to their age with each successive Lo sar. Thus, if someone is born on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month of Lo sar, they are considered to be two years old by the end of their first full day on earth. This also means that people often consider themselves to be a year older on the first day of Lo sar. Only two milestone birthdays are generally celebrated: a child's third birthday and an elder's eightieth birthday.

In 2010, there was a celebration for a child's third birthday in Stong skor Village, however, Lcags thar 'bum, Sgrol ma, and the authors did not attend. Instead they travelled about four hours by car to the home of Mkhar 'bum rgyal's maternal grandmother, in order to attend her eightieth birthday celebration, which was held in her home. She and her closest family members spent most of the time in her bedroom, sitting on the *hedzee*. Guests visited and paid respects throughout the day. Guests who were not family members often paid a quick visit to the person whose birthday was being celebrated, and then adjourned to the house's main room to chat with others. Seats on the *hedzee* and chairs around the stove were reserved for the most respected guests including elders and monks. Others sat on felt spread on the floor. Guests were served fresh tea, alcohol, soft drinks, dumplings, and boiled meat. They were also encouraged to eat bread,

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<sup>19</sup> Tibetan history is understood as a series of sixty-year cycles (T: *rab byung*). Each year is notated by the combination of an animal from the Chinese zodiac, and one of the five elements: earth (*sa*), wood (*shing*), fire (*me*), water (*chu*), and iron/ metal (*lcags*). The first year of the first cycle began in the year 1024 CE, thus 2010 was the twenty-third year of the seventeenth cycle.

candies, and fruits that had been purchased and prepared for the occasion, however, guests ate little out of politeness.

### The Lo sar Period

Housework and herding continued throughout the Lo sar period. Family work was more evenly divided between Ko la and her children during this period, to allow as many people as possible the opportunity to rest, visit, and attend weddings, birthdays, and other celebrations.

Other days of the New Year's period were largely uneventful. Work routines continued as normal, and visiting took place mostly in the afternoon and evening. In accordance with custom, guests brought a gift that often included either a tea brick, or a bottle of liquor to their hosts, and were gifted similarly in return upon leaving. When presenting the gift, people said, "*di nga'i lo rgyal yin* This is my *lo rgyal*." *Lo rgyal* is a contraction of the terms Lo sar and *rgyal bo*, the cross-shaped red bread that was once given as a gift when visiting (see above). Though such bread is no longer given, the term continues to be used to refer to any Lo sar gift. Visiting children were given money and candy. Guests who came during the afternoon often ate little, but evening guests often stayed for dinner and drinking.

The seventh and eighth days of the first lunar month are traditionally considered to be *nyin nag* 'black days' and visiting is taboo. Among the younger generations, however, this custom is less stringently observed than previously. For example, on the seventh day, Mkhar 'bum rgyal hosted several Han villagers from Ma si dui Village, and two Tibetans for food and drinking. On the eighth day, Mkhar 'bum rgyal visited other households.

During 2010, villages sponsored a horse race on the thirteenth day of the first lunar month. This is not a typical Lo sar event locally, but rather reflects the villages' enjoyment of horse culture, despite their gradual move towards motorcycles as the primary mode of transportation. The date of the horse festival was originally scheduled for the seventeenth day of the first lunar month (2 March 2010) but township officials cancelled the event. Instead, it was held on the

thirteenth day of the first lunar month (26 February 2010) on village land, far from government eyes.

As the New Year period neared its end, children spent less time playing. Realizing that classes would soon resume, they picked up their books and did the homework their teachers had assigned weeks earlier.

## Weddings

During this Iron Tiger Year's Lo sar period, five weddings were held in Stong skor Village: one on the third day, one on the fourth, two on the fifth, and one on the eleventh. Weddings in A mdo have been treated in detail elsewhere (Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. 2005, 'Brug mo skyid et al. 2010, and Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart 2007), and we do not provide a detailed description of the wedding process in Stong skor Village. We note, however, certain key differences between the weddings described in Ne'u na and Skya rgya villages (both Buddhist, agricultural communities) and those in Stong skor Village.

First, studies of Tibetan weddings often attempt to recreate, or tell the story of a typical wedding, but it was difficult to find a 'typical' example in Stong skor Village. During this New Year's period, three weddings were held in Bon families, while two were within the Buddhist U Sin Clan. Two weddings featured a *mag pa* 'groom' marrying matrilocally while one wedding featured a horse race sponsored for villagers by the groom's family. Other weddings had no horse race. All the weddings were arranged marriages.

Although certain wedding elements seemed to be fixtures across these five weddings, others were optional and dependent on the availability of qualified people. For example, all weddings began when a tantric practitioner (*A khu dpon*) was deputized to chant a scripture called *g.yang 'bod* 'calling prosperity'. In Buddhist weddings within the U Sin Clan, a literate clan member is often asked to act as a stand-in because there are no Buddhist tantric practitioners in the area. Next, the bride arrives in a procession of cars with her *a zhang* 'maternal uncles' who are the real focal point of the wedding celebrations. The arrival of the bride and the *a zhang* is

the first highly anticipated moment of the wedding (Figure Five), and almost all attendees of the wedding wait outside to see the grand entrance of the bridal party.



FIGURE 5. On the fifth day of the first lunar month (18 February 2010), the bride arrived, flanked by her two *bag rogs* 'bridesmaids.' Her *a zhang* 'maternal uncles' are behind.

As the bride leaves the car, a woman who is the same age as the bride receives her with a white silk *kha btags*. This woman is called the *rta kha len mkhan* 'holder of the horse's reins', hearkening back to the time when a bride and her entourage rode horses to weddings. Another woman or two from the groom's village guides the bride into the home. These women serve as *bag rogs* 'bridesmaids' and are her attendants throughout the wedding. The bride is expected to cover her face and keep her head down at all times. Her *bag rogs* guides her into her new home and takes her to the main room in which the wedding is held, where she kneels on a cushion during the beginning of the ceremony. The bride's maternal uncles follow her into the home and into the main room. When a groom marries into a family, he is led by two of his *a zhang*.

Some weddings feature a *kha brda* 'conversation' between the head *a zhang* and an elder representative from the host side. This is an appreciated, but non-essential part of the wedding in Stong skor Village. The *kha brda* tends to be a speech genre both preferred by and reserved for village elders. A good *kha brda* should contain many *gtam dpe* 'proverbs',<sup>20</sup> and mention the history of previous weddings between the clans involved at that particular wedding, and feature advice from the maternal uncles to the bride's new in-laws. If both chief representatives are young, they may dispense with this process. However, if a regionally well-known speaker is involved, villagers and guests crowd into the room in which the *a zhang* are seated, and stand several rows deep outside to listen.

Village women rush in after the conversation and demand *bag ras* 'bridal cloth' from the *a zhang*, who give this to entreat the village women to protect and care for the bride in her new home. This may become a protracted debate if there are eloquent speakers among both men and women. If there are no such accomplished speakers, this wedding section is abbreviated. If the *a zhang* do not accede to the request through eloquent speech, the women push the men, grabbing at them and pulling one of them away to hold as a hostage to be ransomed for the cloth. Women debate with the men during this process. Eventually the *a zhang* give the cloth. At this point, men from among the *a zhang* and village women begin singing folk songs to each other in order to find a suitable singing partner for the *la gzhas* 'love songs' that will be sung outside shortly thereafter.<sup>21</sup> There was a great struggle before the cloth was given on the wedding held on the third day of the first lunar month. At other weddings in Stong skor during the Lo sar period there were no such struggles.

Singing moves outside the host family's yard to a place where village women and members of the *a zhang* can sing *la gzhas* away from the ears of village men. When a woman sings, she begins holding an open bottle of beer, and offers it to the man of her choice. After she finishes singing, the man sings back to her in response.

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<sup>20</sup> See Pirie (2009) and Tournadre and Robin (2006) for more on *gtam dpe*.

<sup>21</sup> For more on *la gzhas* and their accompanying taboos, see Anton-Luca's (2002) introduction to contemporary Amdo Tibetan love songs and Rossi (1992).

Songs are sung simultaneously, with several women and several men singing different songs with different melodies targeting their own singing partners. It is taboo for men and women from the same family to sing love songs in front of each other. To avoid this risk, village men are absent during this part of the wedding. Instead, they often stay in a separate room, eating, drinking, and singing folk songs. Some elders sit and talk with the elder *a zhang* who choose not to participate in the singing. Other villagers might sit apart in the family's home drinking alcohol and talking.

Following the *la gzhas* singing, all assemble back in the original room used to greet the *a zhang*, who then return home with the bride. All guests are fed after these *a zhang* have left. While hosts encourage everyone to eat more, it is considered impolite to eat too much – younger *a zhang* do not usually touch the food offered by the host family.

Occasionally, as on the wedding held on the fifth day of the Lo sar period, horse races are held. On that day, prizes for the winners were sponsored by the family hosting the wedding, and consisted of *phrug* 'woolen cloth' and a *sa gdan* 'rug' for the winner, rugs for those placing second through fourth, and a hat for the fifth-placed rider. Races were held in two separate categories: two-year old horses, and horses older than two years old. The races were held on an open area close to the host's home and approximately one kilometer in distance.

As might be inferred from the above description, the bride and groom play limited roles in the wedding activities. Although members of the host's immediate and extended families often must take active roles in food preparation and serving, some of this work may be contracted to local Han cooks from the *ma dui* villages.

### After the New Year

Following the end of the New Year period, food originally earmarked for guests was eaten. Candies, meat, and fruits that had been nibbled on throughout the previous fifteen days were then available to the family to eat. On 4 March 2010, children returned to school, family work returned to normal, and visiting decreased.

## A COMPARISON WITH SKE BA VILLAGE

Despite similar Lo sar practices across a number of areas on the Tibetan Plateau, the essay of Lo sar practices in Ske ba Village, a village in Mang ra County, by Tsering Bum et al. (2008), shows marked differences from those seen in Stong skor. These differences include making different types of red bread, offering different meats to guests, and a number of practices that were not present in one or the other of the villages. The examples provided below are representative rather than exhaustive, and illustrate how greatly practices may vary within a relatively small geographic region.

One difference between Stong skor and Ske ba lies in the idea of the New Year for livestock, held in Ske ba on the second day of Lo sar, which is described as (Tsering Bum et al. 2008:40):

a day for owners to serve their animals. In the morning, cattle, sheep, dogs, and pigs are given human food such as red bread and noodles. Cattle and sheep are given fresh winter grass. Livestock owners never beat animals on this day, for doing so brings bad luck.

There is no such tradition in Stong skor. Instead, the second day of the New Year period is treated as any other except that it is a day for extensive visiting. When asked directly, Stong skor villagers expressed no concept of a livestock's New Year. This difference is particularly interesting, given the importance of livestock to the livelihood of Stong skor villagers.

Additionally, Stong skor villagers do not celebrate Hearth Deity's Lo sar on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth lunar month. In Ske ba the family's Hearth Deity is offered special foods. Although Stong skor villagers offer the New Year's first three cups of alcohol to Hearth Deity, there is no specific day on which Hearth Deity is specifically venerated.

Third, whereas Ske ba villagers visit their ancestors' graves, about two kilometers west of the village, and prostrate to their graves (Tsering Bum et al. 2008:35), there is no analogous practice in Stong skor's Lo sar tradition. Stong skor villagers have traditionally

practiced both sky burial and earth burial, and burn *tsha gsur*<sup>22</sup> on the anniversary of the deceased's passing.

The final major difference to be discussed here lies in Stong skor holding no special events on the fifteenth and final day of the New Year period. While Ske ba Village celebrates the final day with circle dancing, singing, people dressed in their best clothing, and a gathering in the village meeting hall, Stong skor Village has no such traditions.

The origin of these differences is difficult to trace, and yet, these comparisons make clear that geographic proximity or any model suggesting a relatively geographically fixed monoculture is less than ideal in approaching the immensely diverse cultural practices within A mdo. Differences likely arise from several factors that deserve attention when discussing regional popular practice. Perhaps the most obvious difference is varying subsistence strategies. Ske ba villagers were once agro-pastoralists, but are now exclusively farmers. As a result of their lifestyle differences and changes, they have access to, and raise different types of animals (namely pigs). Conversely, Stong skor villagers were, in their recent past, entirely nomadic. Though they have since settled into fixed accommodations, they continue robust engagement with a pastoral lifestyle. Many of their differing practices reflect this. Swine, for example, play an important role in several different phases of the Ske ba Village Lo sar, while pork has no place in Stong skor, nor do Stong skor villages raise pigs. Additionally, Ske ba Village burial practices, and certain Lo sar activities seem related to their agro-pastoral roots, and display a greater attachment to place than in Stong skor.

Village histories may also figure in a village's customs. Stong skor villagers migrated from the Stong che region in present-day Khri ka County, which may explain the high percentage of Bon practitioners in the 'Brog ru Tribe, and shed light on religious and secular practices important to Stong skor villagers such as the making of *rgyal bo*, that are an important part of Lo sar practices in Khri ka (see 'Brug mo skyid et al. 2010:211-218). At the same time, it does not

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<sup>22</sup> *Tsha gsur* is an "offering made by roasting [a] mixture of *tsampa* [*rtsam pa*] w[ith] the three whites [milk, butter, and yogurt] and three sweets [honey, sugar, and molasses]" (Pema Kunsang 2003:2189).



account for all of the variation noted above as Ske ba villagers also trace their origins to Khri ka County.

Differences of practice between Stong skor and the agropastoral village of Ske ba described by Tsering Bum et al., suggest that geographic proximity and governmental administrative divisions are a relatively arbitrary basis for examining Tibetan cultural practices. This is similar to Roche's (2008:xxvi) assertion that, in the context of weddings, there exist, "significant [differences] in the wedding as lived experience, to the extent that a villager from [one village] would likely feel somewhat disoriented at a[nother village's] wedding." Indeed, the situation in Stong skor is more complex than these differences indicate, and the village's unique migration pattern and history, Mongol toponyms, and religious complexity help explain certain differences in practice across small areas, and suggests the need for more detailed descriptive studies.

#### CONCLUSION: A NOTE ON SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

We call for increased attention to cultural practices in pastoralist areas, and problematize simplifications and generalizations about Tibetan culture and cultural practices by showing differences in practice between two villages that are separated by a mere fifty or sixty kilometers. As such it serves as an addition to a growing body of descriptive scholarship that sheds light on the tremendous internal variation along the Tibetan Plateau (for example, Rin chen rdo rje and Stuart 2009, Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart 2007, Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. 2005, Kelsang Norbu 2011, and Klu mo tshe ring and Roche 2011). We also suggest that, in examining continuities in practice, simple geographic regions may not be the best way to structure such discussions. Care must be exercised to recognize that, in a part of the world in which nomadic pastoralism played an important role until recently, community histories and migration stories, as well as traditional lifestyles, may exert powerful influence on the form of Lo sar and other festival practices.

This study of Lo sar in Stong skor also highlights the rapid changes Tibetan culture faced at the close of the first decade of the

twenty-first century. In some cases, this involved the loss of traditional knowledge, such as the rapid disappearance of red bread-related taboos over the course of just two generations. In others, it represented the influence of mass media in its ability to provide standard representations of Tibetan culture, and to promote Han and Western cultural values. Indeed, even though Stong skor Village elders showed no interest in dance and modern music, these are the images of Tibetan culture eagerly absorbed on Qinghai Tibetan television by young Stong skor Tibetans.

Also, within six months of the 2010 Lo sar, a local NGO had provided running water to Stong skor Village. This alone has the power to change the nature of local, daily routines and responsibilities. It has yet to be seen how this may affect local culture, or New Year's practices, but it may prove a catalyst for profound transformation.

Young children often express very little interest in studying *gtam dpe* and *dmangs glu* 'folk songs', in favor of *skor bro* 'circle dances' and *rdung len* 'mandolin singing' that are often featured on Qinghai Tibetan language television, and on VCDs sold in Mgo mang Township Town and in shops across the Plateau. Although such images are reinforced throughout the year, it appears that the Lo sar period and the special Tibetan language variety show broadcast the night before Lo sar play an important role in this process, as traditions most strongly associated with a relatively distinct geographic region are then distributed both locally, and nationally, as exhibitions of Tibetan culture as a whole.

This descriptive article leaves much room for future studies to take a more analytic approach in recognition of the Lo sar period as a rich repository of both traditional knowledge and an evolving folk culture. Oral history, toponyms, and folk religious practices collectively play critical roles in understanding the unique make-up of Stong skor's history, people, and Lo sar practices. Meanwhile, taboos and customs often give insight into ideas of purity and lead to understanding of such concepts as *rten 'brel* 'causality'. Studying these festival events in relation to oral histories, toponymy, and folk religious practice would be profitable.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Brog ru འབྲོག་རུ  
'di nga'i lo rgyal yin འདི་ངའི་ལོ་རྒྱལ་ཡིན།  
'then thug འཐོན་ཐུག

A

A khu dpon ཨ་ཁུ་དཔོན།  
A mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
*a zhang* ཨ་ཅང་།

B

*bag rogs* བག་རོགས།  
*bla ma* ལྷ་མ།  
*Bon* བོན།  
*bsang* བསང་།  
*bsang khri* བསང་ཁྱི།

C

Chab cha ཆབ་ཆ།  
Chab chang ཆབ་ཆང་།  
Chab mdo ཆབ་མདོ།  
*chang* ཆང་།  
*chu* ཅུ།  
Chunjie wanhui 春节晚会

D

Dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་།  
Dgu rgyag དགུ་རྒྱུག་།  
*dgu thug* དགུ་ཐུག་།  
Dka' thub tshe ring དཀའ་ཐུབ་ཙམ་རིང་།  
*dmangs glu* དམངས་ལྷུ་།  
Dmyal ba དམྱལ་བ།

F

fen tiao 粉条

G

go re bsles ma གོ་རེ་བསྐྱེས་མ།  
go re dmar ro གོ་རེ་དམར་རོ།

*go re sog sog* གོ་རེ་སོག་སོག་

Gonghe 共和

Gshin rje chos rgyal གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་

*gtam dpe* གཏམ་དཔེ་

*guan tou* 罐头

Guo ma ying caoye kaifa youxian zeren gong si 过马营草野开发有限责  
任公司

*g.yang 'bod* གཡང་འབོད་

H

Han 汉

*he dzee*

Huanghe qingke pijiu 黄河青稞啤酒

Hui 回

K

*kang* 炕

*kha brda* ཁ་བར་ད།

*kha btags* ཁ་བཏགས།

Khams ཁམས།

Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

Ko la ཀོ་ལ།

Kos nan ཀོས་ནན།

Kun dga' ཀུན་དགའ།

L

*la gzhas* ལ་གཞས།

*lajiu* 辣酒

*lcags* ལུགས།

Lcags thar 'bum ལུགས་ཐར་འབུམ།

*Liu fu ren jia* 六福人家

*lo rgyal* ལོ་རྒྱལ།

*lo rnying* ལོ་རྟིང་།

*lo sar* ལོ་སར།

*lo sar bzang* ལོ་སར་བཟང་།

M

*ma cAng* མ་རྩང་།

*ma dui* 马队

Ma si dui 马四队

majiang 麻将

ma mo མ་མོ།

Mang ra མང་ར།

me མེ།

Mgo mang མགོ་མང་།

mgron po lam dkar མགྲོན་པོ་ལམ་དཀར།

mian pian 面片

Mkhar 'bum rgyal མཁར་འབུམ་རྒྱལ།

Mo khor མོ་ཁོར།

Mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

Mtsho sngon bod skad brnyan 'phrin མཚོ་སྔོན་བོད་སྐད་བརྟན་འཕྲིན།

N

Ne'u na རྟེན་ལྔ།

Nong li 农历

Nub phyogs su bskyod pa'i zin tho རུབ་ཕྱོགས་སུ་བསྟོད་པའི་ཟིན་ཐོ།

nyin nag ཉིན་ནག།

P

phrug ཕུག།

Q

Qinghai 青海, Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

R

rab byung རབ་བྱུང་།

rdung len རྩེད་ལེན།

Rgya lo རྒྱ་ལོ།

rgyal bo རྒྱལ་བོ།

rlung rta རྩེད་རྟ།

RMB (abbreviation for Renminbi) 人民币

rta kha len mkhan རྟ་ཁ་ལེན་མཁན།

rten 'brel རྟེན་འབྲེལ།

S

sa ས།

sa gdan ས་གདན།

Sgrol ma སྐྱོལ་མ།

shing ཤིང་།



Ske ba སྐེ་བ།  
 skor bro སྐོར་བོ།  
 Skya rgya སྐུ་རྒྱ།  
 Sman bla skyabs སྐྱེན་བླ་སྐུ་བས།  
 snum སྐུམ།  
 Stong che སྟོང་ཆེ།  
 Stong skor སྟོང་སྐོར།

T

Thab lha ཐབ་ལྷ།  
 thang ka ཐང་ཀ།  
 Tsering Bum, tshe ring 'bum ཚེ་རིང་འབུམ།  
 Tsering Samdrup, tshe ring bsams grub ཚེ་རིང་བསམ་གྲུབ།  
 tsha gsur ཚ་གསུཅ།  
 Tshe dbang skyid ཚེ་དབང་སྐྱིད།  
 tsho ba ཚོ་བ།  
 tshod ma ཚོད་མ།

U

U Sin ཡུ་སིན།

X

Xinjiang 新疆

Y

yuan 元



# HAIL PREVENTION RITUALS AND RITUAL PRACTITIONERS IN NORTHEAST AMDO

Rdo rje don grub (Southeast Missouri State University)

## ABSTRACT

Hail prevention rituals and *ser srung* 'hail prevention ritual practitioners' in Skya rgya Village (Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province) are described. The origins and history of the *ser srung* are discussed and their ritual implements and practices are detailed. Tibetan texts related to *ser srung* are provided with English translations.

## KEYWORDS

*gdams pa*, hail, hail prevention, *sde brgyad*, *ser srung*, *ser tho*

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Hail prevention has a history of several centuries in Skya rgya (Jiajia), a community located in Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. The village is divided into seven hamlets: Ru 'og ma, Pha gzhi, Bar rtsig, Gle ring, Yang gle, A 'byung, and Gnam steng. The first five hamlets belong to Kha stod 'Upper Skya rgya', and the latter two to Kha smad 'Lower Skya rgya'. The village had approximately 430 households in 2010. All residents were Tibetan.

Hail prevention ritual practitioners known as *ser srung* were traditionally much respected locally and people paid *ser 'bru* 'hail prevention tax' for their services. In 2012, however, there were no *ser srung* in Skya rgya, though their ritual implements and texts remained, as well as memories of *ser srung* ritual activity.

Villagers' perspectives on the causes of hail, the origins and history of Skya rgya *ser srung*, and the ritual implements used by *ser srung* (with photographs of each) are presented. The characteristics, capabilities, skills, and qualities of *ser srung* are described. Hail prevention rituals and the practice of *ser srung* collecting hail prevention tax are also detailed.

This article is based on fieldwork, interviews with local elders, and the collection and analysis of folklore and traditional songs. The text also includes information summarized from the Buddhist scripture, *The Pavilion in the Stirred Mirror of Instruction: Preventing Hail through the Secret Sādhana of Hayagrīva*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Blo brtan rdo rje, Gerald Roche, Timothy Thurston, Daniel Berounský, and CK Stuart for assistance in the preparation of this article. Any remaining mistakes are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Rta mgrin gsang sgrub kyi sgo nas ser ba srung ba'i gdam pa me long 'khrug pa'i gur khang*, hereafter abbreviated as *Preventing Hail*. This text and most of the other Tibetan texts used in this paper are extracted from *Rta mgrin chos 'khor* composed by Lcang skya rol ba'i rdo rje (1717-1786), and obtained from Gsang sgrog Monastery.

## HAIL AND ITS CAUSES IN SKYA RGYA

According to a local account, the mountain deity, Mgon po brag nag, causes hail in Skya rgya Village.

Four great mountains inhabited by mountain deities surround Skya rgya Village. A ye Klu sman is in the east; Mgon po brag nag is in the north; A myes Srin po is in the west; and A myes Brag dkar is in the south.

Once, A myes Srin po and Brag dkar both wanted to marry A ye Klu sman, which caused them to quarrel. Finally, A myes Srin po married A ye Klu sman and gave her a fox fur hat. Brag dkar was angered by this and struck A myes Srin po's head with a stick. A myes Srin po retaliated by scratching Brag dkar's head. Later, to avoid surprise attacks by Brag dkar, A myes Srin po turned to face him, which is why, today, A myes Srin po has two peaks facing Brag dkar.

Since then, Mgon po brag nag has been very jealous of A myes Srin po's marriage and harasses him by sending hail to the village. However, whenever he is about to send hail, A ye Klu sman notices and puts on her hat to warn A myes Srin po.<sup>3</sup>

Such mountain deities are called *gzhi bdag*. According to village elders, local mountain deities send hail against each other when the villages they protect have conflicts. Locals consider hail to be a weapon used by the *sde brgyad*<sup>4</sup> 'the eight classes of deities and spirits', to fight with each other. Villagers believe that these invisible

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<sup>3</sup> This account is a synthesis of what I heard numerous times from various community members.

<sup>4</sup> Formally written *lha srin sde brgyad*, the composition of the *sde brgyad* varies, with one common description being devas (*lha*), nāgas (*klu*), yakshas (*gnod sbyin*), gandharvas (*dri za*), asuras (*lha ma yin*), garuḍas (*nam kha' lding*), kinnaras (*mi 'am ci*), and mahoragas (*lto 'phye chen po*) (THL online dictionary: <http://dictionary.thlib.org>, accessed 6 May 2012).

spirits both help and harm individuals and communities. These spirits assist people who take refuge in them and who honor them with prayers and offerings. When poorly treated, they may become furious and cause disasters such as diseases, drought, and hailstorms. Villagers also believe that the *sde brgyad* need to eat, and they harvest grain by sending hail to destroy crops in village fields. This belief is further substantiated by villagers sometimes finding wheat husks in the rifts of mountains where deities are believed to dwell.

In order to protect village crops, *Skya rgya ser srung* are thought to wage war with the *sde brgyad*. *Ser srung* rely on their *gdams pa* (instructions), mantras, and meditative visualizations of deities to stop hail and protect village farmlands.

#### ORIGINS OF SER SRUNG IN SKYA RGYA

Village *ser srung* typically belonged to the Mo gzu Household.<sup>5</sup> *Skya rgya* village elders said there were no designated *ser srung* before the Mo gzu Household settled in the village. Instead, the position of *ser srung* rotated annually among village *sngags pa*.<sup>6</sup>

The first *ser srung*, Mo gzu, was brought from Ska phug<sup>7</sup> Village by Pandita<sup>8</sup> 'Jam dbyangs dbang phyug around 1740 to Bar rtsig Hamlet, as this was 'Jam dbyangs dbang phyug's birthplace and he wanted Mo gzu to be *Skya rgya's ser srung*. Mo gzu Household members are considered direct descendants of Sakya Pandita<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>5</sup> Most households are referred to by the name of the male household head, which changes from generation to generation. Households that have had a *bla ma*, other respected religious practitioners, or leaders are referred to by adding *tshang* 'household' after the dignitary's name or title, sometimes followed by their village name. This name is used for that household in perpetuity, but not for descendants of that household who establish new households.

<sup>6</sup> *Sngags pa* are household tantric practitioners of the Rnying ma pa sect.

<sup>7</sup> A village about thirty kilometers from *Skya rgya*.

<sup>8</sup> Great scholar.

<sup>9</sup> Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) was one of the Five Sakya forefathers and exercised political power over Tibetans on behalf of the Mongols. He is also

also to be of the *ser srung* lineage and *gdams pa*.

Most villagers do not remember the name of the second *ser srung* (b. ~1760), but recall that his son was named Chos dar. When the second *ser srung* was young, the Mo gzu Household and the Ma nang a lags Household's relatives quarreled. Later, a relative of the Ma nang a lags Household was murdered by a Mo gzu Household member. An indemnity was subsequently levied against the Mo gzu Household, who also lost their right to prevent hail. The monk, Ma nang a lags, who was locally famous for having attained meditative realization of 'Jigs byed<sup>10</sup> and being able to harness the deity's energies, subsequently assumed the role of *ser srung* in Skya rgya. Locals claim that Ma nang a lags's practice of 'Jigs byed was so advanced that he had a horn just like the deity's. However, despite adeptly practicing tantra, mantra, and meditation, he was unable to prevent hail from striking Skya rgya. As heavy hail fell one day, Ma nang a lags saw Chos dar (b. ~1780), the son of the previous *ser srung*. He picked the child up, and the hail immediately ceased. He then realized that even though he successfully practiced 'Jigs byed, he lacked the *ser srung* lineage, and then returned the right to prevent hail to the Mo gzu Household and to Chos dar's father.

Chos dar became the third Skya rgya Mo gzu Household *ser srung*. His father taught him to read and write Tibetan, and to recite tantra and mantra. He inherited all the mantra his father knew. Elders say he was very studious and diligently practiced mantra, especially those of Gsang bdag<sup>11</sup> and Rta mgrin.<sup>12</sup> Because Chos dar often directed hail to fall on Gle zhol Hamlet in Do rgya Village,

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known as Sa pan (THL online dictionary: <http://dictionary.thlib.org>, accessed 6 May 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Vajrabhairava, a form of Yamāntaka, the wrathful form of Mañjuśrī, serves as a meditational deity in Tibetan esoteric Buddhism. He also serves as a dharma protector.

<sup>11</sup> Guhyapati Vajrapāṇi, in a trinity with Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī representing power, compassion, and wisdom of all Buddhas. He is considered to be one of the most powerful dharma protectors in Tibet.

<sup>12</sup> Hayagrīva.

villagers there asked him to protect their crops by conducting hail prevention rituals for them, and paid *ser 'bru* 'hail tax' to him for this service.

The fourth Skya rgya *ser srung*, Shag kya (b. ~1840) was a direct descendant of the previous *ser srung*, and was also adept at Tibetan chess. One summer, several young village men were doubtful about Shag kya's ability to prevent hail, went to his house as dark clouds approached the village, and began a chess game with Shag kya, who concentrated on playing. After a short while, the storm broke over the village. Shag kya realized this, worried that hail would destroy the village's crops, took out his ritual implements, climbed onto his roof, sat cross-legged, held his palms together in front of his nose, and began meditating on the deity Bya rgyal khyung.<sup>13</sup>

Hail began falling heavily around him and his house. The young village men laughed and said, "See, Shag kya, there is so much hail here. You prevented nothing."

Shag kya answered confidently and calmly, "Don't worry. I meditated on Bya rgyal khyung. Its wings will prevent hail from falling on all our farmland, except in outlying areas." The young villagers did not believe him and went to the fields to check. When they arrived, they were amazed to see that though hail had fallen at the edges of the field, none had fallen on the crops. Shag kya's fame then spread. After Shag kya died, all villagers mourned his death.

The fifth Skya rgya *ser srung*, Bla ma tshe ring (b. ~1890), was a member of the Mo gzu Household and the son of the previous *ser srung*. He rarely practiced tantra, mantra, or meditation and frequently sought income by mending clothes and shoes, wandering to nearby villages and lingering there. He was not recognized as a good *ser srung*. Soon after the famine and widespread destruction of 1958, his wife died and his daughter married and moved into another household. He then took his son and went to Mang ra Village, Mang ra (Guinan) County.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A large, mythical bird often described as the king of birds – the garuḍa.

<sup>14</sup> Mang ra is both the Tibetan name of Guinan County and the name of a



Bsam gtan rgya mtsho (~1925-1990) was the sixth and last Skya rgya *ser srung*. Unlike former *ser srung*, he was not a direct descendant of the previous *ser srung*. He was initially a monk in Gsang sgrog<sup>15</sup> Monastery, where he meditated on the deity Gsang bdag, chanting his mantra numerous times. Monks in Gsang sgrog said he chanted Gsang bdag's mantra one hundred million times and thus obtained unique powers. Bsam gtan rgya mtsho became a farmer and married during the Cultural Revolution. When Bsang sgrog Monastery was rebuilt in 1980, he was unable to resume being a monk for he already had a wife, but he did become the Skya rgya *ser srung*. However, he was not considered a competent *ser srung* because disastrous hailstorms destroyed many crops even when Bsam gtan rgya mtsho conducted hail prevention rituals. However, he was known for curing villagers' (especially children's) skin diseases by blowing on them and for being able to communicate with birds. Bsam gtan rgya mtsho had a short temper and was angered if, for example, a village or household gave insufficient *ser 'bru*, which explains why he practiced hail prevention rituals only intermittently, sometimes stopping for several years.

The role of *ser srung* disappeared from Skya rgya after Bsam gtan rgya mtsho died.

#### SER SRUNG CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPLEMENTS

*Ser srung* must possess three qualities to successfully prevent hail: *gdams pa'i rgyud pa* (lineage), *bsnyen pa* (meditative realization), and *sgrub pa* (empowerment). Each is introduced below.

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specific village in Guinan County.

<sup>15</sup> A monastery in Skya rgya.

*Gdams pa'i rgyud pa*

*Gdams pa* refers to the teaching, instructions, or advice concerning a secret doctrine, *rgyud pa* refers to lineage, and *gdams pa'i brgyud pa*, therefore, refers to the lineage teachings of a secret doctrine. *Gdams pa* may only be transmitted after the potential recipient has been tested to determine if he is a suitable candidate, by comparing him to a 'vessel'. Three types of vessels cannot receive *gdams pa*: a broken vessel, or one with holes, connotes someone who is forgetful; an inverse vessel indicates an individual who does not listen to others; and a vessel with poison symbolizes someone who will cause harm if given *gdams pa*.

Dreams and divination were used to identify the type of 'vessel' a person was. A candidate was examined three times over a period lasting between a few months and many years. *Skya rgya ser srung* typically bestowed their *gdams pa* on a son or other close male relative. The following quotes attest to the importance that locals place on a *ser srung*'s lineage.

*Skya rgya ser srung* had *gdams pa'i rgyud pa*. Therefore, they must have been useful. Most people believe the sky is vast and people are small, and that people can't affect the sky, but that's not the truth.<sup>16</sup>

I strongly believe *ser srung* were useful, but not since *Bla ma tshe ring*. *Bsam gtan rgya mtsho* was not a good *ser srung*, even though he chanted the hail-preventing mantra one hundred million times. Actually he wasn't a member of the *Mo gzu* Household and didn't have the lineage of a *ser srung*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rgya gar (b. 1949).

<sup>17</sup> Mgon po rgyal (b. 1946).

*Bsnyen pa*

A *ser srung*, whether a monk, tantric practitioner, or lay person, must practice *bsnyen pa*, which entails meditating on a deity, chanting the deity's mantra, praying to them, and making offerings, often in seclusion in a closed room. These actions enable the practitioner to accumulate the deity's power, which manifests itself in *rtags* 'signs', including the ability to make a plant wither or heal a wound with one's breath. *Preventing Hail* states that there are three types of signs: the manifestation of the deity before the practitioner, dreams of the deity transporting the practitioner somewhere or talking to him, and a solar or lunar eclipse occurring during meditation. Locals also believe that the appearance of rainbows during meditation is a sign of a *ser srung*'s meditative attainment. *Ser srung* who reach this level are able to prevent hail.

*Sgrub pa*

*Sgrub pa* refers to the empowerment of ritual implements used by *ser srung*, including *chu phyang* 'raincoat', *rwa dung* 'conch', 'ur cha 'sling', and *ser rde'u* 'hail pills'. Each is described below. A *ser srung* empowers his ritual implements before hail prevention rituals.



FIGURE 1. *Chu phyng* 'raincoat'.

This *chu phyng* is made of durable yak hair felt, and kept a *ser srung* warm and dry during rain or hail. This *chu phyng* is said to have been taken from Sakya Pandita's family.



FIGURE 2. *Rwa dung* 'conch'.

The *rwa dung* features a metal mouthpiece to avoid abrasion and contains a mantra written on paper. The *rwa dung* is considered powerful because it has been empowered by many generations of *ser srung*, and its sound is said to be painful to the eight classes of deities and spirits. It also has a long history of unknown duration according to elders.



FIGURE 3. '*Ur cha* 'sling'.

Herders typically use yak-hair slings. This sling is unique in that it contains human skin, a ball of widow's hair, and *ser rde'u* (see below) that have been empowered with chanting. The *ser rde'u* and widow's hair are from Sakya Pandita's family. The plaiting of the rope changes direction from clockwise to counterclockwise nine times.



FIGURE 4. *Ser rde'u*, pills kept in a small fabric bag.

The small pills were often white mustard seeds. The larger pills are said to contain soil from a destroyed castle wall, ash of burned copper, water and soil from a spring inhabited by *nāga* (*klu*), the water of melted hail that has damaged crops, soil taken after a flood, soil from the site of a lightning strike, ash of burned musk deer and mad dog canine teeth, soil of a place where people have been killed, soil from a crossroads, and the flesh of a brown bear. Additionally, each of the larger *ser rde'u* contains a repelling mantra<sup>18</sup> written on a tiny piece of paper with a mixture of ink, blood, and poison. The larger *ser rde'u* are also from Sakya Pandita's family.

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<sup>18</sup> *Zlog sngags*.



FIGURE 5. This was previously inside a *ser 'khor*, a prayer wheel used by *ser srung*.

This mantra paper was once inside a *ser 'khor* 'prayer wheel' used by *ser srung*. The prayer wheel was subsequently lost or destroyed. It is said that during Bsam gtan rgya mtsho's time, he put this paper into a small iron box that he swung on a rope towards hail clouds.





FIGURE 6. *Ga'u* and *rdo rje*.

The deity depicted in the *ga'u* is Gsang bdag. Meditating on Gsang bdag and reciting his mantra are considered efficacious in preventing hail. The *rdo rje* (see below) tied on the silk strip is considered efficacious in protecting the *ser srung* and in defeating his enemies.



FIGURE 7. This *thang ka* was hung in the place where the *ser srung* empowered his ritual implements.



FIGURE 8 AND 9. *Da ru*, *dril bu*, and *rdo rje*.

The first picture shows *Da ru* and the second, a *dril bu* (left) and *rdo rje* (right). These implements were used in rituals empowering other ritual implements and substances.

*Preventing Hail* states that implements must be empowered to protect the *ser srung* from lightning strike, *mnan pa* 'suppression' must be performed, and other ritual implements must be empowered.

Items that protect the *ser srung* during the ritual were empowered first. To do this, the *ser srung* made 1,000 three-sided daggers using *skyer ba*.<sup>19</sup> Each had a mantra written on it and the *ser srung* empowered it by blowing on it. Similarly, he also made small rectangular battens on which his deity was drawn and then he blew on them. The small daggers were used to construct a box that was then wrapped in a bolt of yellow silk.

The implements used to defeat the eight classes of gods and spirits were empowered next. *Dug rdzas* 'poisonous substance' prepared from horse and donkey hair, musk, black saffron, pig fat, black dog feces, and the flesh of snakes and frogs, was used to empower the '*ur cha* and *ser rde'u*.

A ritual called *mnan pa* was also performed. A triangular wooden box was made and a piece of paper soaked in poison, featuring an outline of a deity that may harm the community, was placed inside. The deity was depicted with a thin body bound by an iron chain, with blood coming from its mouth and nose. The *ser srung* then chanted a mantra to entice the deity into the triangular box. If he successfully suppressed the deity, the outline on the paper appeared lifelike. He next dug a triangular hole at the edge of farmland where hail commonly fell and buried the box. A small stupa of soil clods, called *ser tho*, was built over the filled-in hole. After chanting scriptures about the *khro bo bcu*<sup>20</sup> the *ser tho* was thought to be possessed by one of these deities. The *ser tho* then protected

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<sup>19</sup> *Skyer ba* 'barberry' is a thorny plant with a yellow, bitter inner layer used in Tibetan medicine, and tiny, very sour seeds. Two types of barberry grow in Skya rgya: *skyer dkar* (*Berberis jamesiana* Forrest & W. W. Sm.) and *skyer nag* (*Berberis tsarica* Ahrendt). The former are white and *skyer nag* is darker. *Skyer ba* is especially flexible and was historically used to make bows.

<sup>20</sup> The Ten Wrathful Ones (THL online dictionary: <http://dictionary.thlib.org>, accessed 6 May 2012).

cropland from hail.

The process of suppression described above is complex and difficult. For convenience, Skya rgya *ser srung* often simply set up a *ser tho* and painted it white without burying anything under it. A *ser srung* might also have used a piece of wood covered by long, coiled grass. Among the grass was a piece of paper inscribed with a mantra and 'Skya rgya yul phyogs 'di yi lo tog dang rtsi shing mi dang srog chags tshang ma la gnod pa mi byed cig Don't harm the crops, plants, people, or animals in the land of Skya rgya'. This was stuck in the ground as a *ser tho* on Ser tho Hill, above the village. After the *ser tho* was set up, Kha stod villagers, including both men and women, came to a small hill beside Ser tho Hill and offered *bsang* and for seven days chanted a crop protection scripture such as Gdugs dkar, Ma ri tsi, or the mantra of Rta mgrin. The Shing lu'u Household<sup>21</sup> in Bar rtsig was responsible for giving a male goat when the ritual was held. This type of *ser tho* was usually built in Skya rgya because it required none of the hard-to-obtain substances required for other methods.

#### SER SRUNG REGULATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

According to *Preventing Hail*, *ser srung* must abide by the following nine regulations:

1. Trust and believe in the *gdams pa* as the substantive and fundamental quality of a *ser srung*. Be self-confident, and doubt neither the *gdams pa* nor himself.
2. Have wrathful eyes and abundant offering substances when facing hail.
3. *Rdzongs pa* 'offerings' to the eight classes of deities and spirits are

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<sup>21</sup> There are two Shing lu'u households, one in Pha gzhi and the other in Bar rtsig.

important.

4. Concentrate completely when practicing mantra.
5. Be able to successfully conduct fortunetelling.
6. Be able to locate the direction of the eight classes of deities and spirits.
7. A *ser srung*'s capability to distinguish appropriate and inappropriate days is important, as this determines a ritual's efficacy.
8. Be able to prevent hail of the eight classes of deities and spirits.
9. Be able to protect themselves against lightning strikes. Being a *ser srung* is dangerous because of the possibility of being struck by lightning. Several methods may prevent this, including drawing a five-pointed star, with every point containing a mantra syllable.



FIGURE 10. The five-pointed star in *Preventing Hail*.

*Ser srung* in Skya rgya also had the *ser 'khor* that was spun in a counterclockwise direction to protect the *ser srung* from being struck by lightning.

To maintain his power, a *ser srung* did not steal, cheat, lie, or smoke; eat garlic, onion, or meat; drink liquor; and did not slaughter cattle, sheep, or pigs from the eleventh day of the second lunar month to the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. He furthermore abstained from sexual intercourse, did not sleep during the day, and avoided places where conflicts, especially between women, occurred.

He carefully ensured that his *srung ma*<sup>22</sup> was not contaminated by negative energies from wearing or passing beneath others' clothing. He did not sew or touch needles during this time, maintained good relationships with *bla ma*, and avoided contact with widows.

During the seventh lunar month, *ser srung* often stayed on Skya nag Hill at a tantric hall and accumulated power by chanting mantra. While there he ate bread, butter, *rtsam pa*, and yogurt and drank milk tea. He occasionally might have returned home.

*Ser srung* also managed the Chos 'khur<sup>23</sup> 'Carrying Scriptures' ritual, held twice a year during the third and seventh lunar months. The first time was after sowing the fields and the second was a month before the harvest. During the ritual, Kha stod villagers circumambulated their farmlands in a clockwise direction led by a person carrying the *Brgyad stong pa*.<sup>24</sup> Villagers followed in two groups, with men in front and women behind. The *ser srung* was last and carried his *ser 'khor* in his left hand and held a stick in his right hand, which he used to beat those who violated rules, such as chatting while circumambulating.

While carrying such scriptures as *Bka' 'gyur*, *Bstan 'gyur*, and *Brgyad stong pa*, villagers chanted *oM ma ni pad me h+UM*. Both men and women sang the mantra twice in turn. The scriptures they carried were borrowed from Gsang sgrog Monastery by the *ser srung*, who paid part of his *ser 'bru* to the monastery as a fee for using the scriptures.

Chos 'khur started after a *bsang* offering on Rin chen chos gling Hill to the north of Skya rgya. During the two breaks while circumambulating, all villagers ate bread and drank tea, men wrestled, and women chatted and watched the men while sitting along the field borders. The circumambulation circuit was

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<sup>22</sup> Family protector or guardian deity.

<sup>23</sup> This ritual is also referred to as Chos 'khor in certain other Tibetan communities.

<sup>24</sup> *Prajñāpāramitā* in 8,000 verses.



approximately twenty kilometers long and a whole day was spent in walking it.

This ritual was held to avoid drought and hail and to ensure a good harvest. With the permission of *ser srung*, Kha smad villagers also held the ritual by themselves – Kha stod and Kha smad could not finish circumambulating all Skya rgya farmland in a single day. The *ser srung* was not involved in the ritual in Kha smad.

On the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month, the *ser srung* managed the Dbyar ston 'Summer Festival', which was held for two days to enable the *ser srung* to successfully prevent hail. During the festival, the Skya rgya Village leader gave a speech defining Skya rgya's territory, and villagers held horse races and shooting competitions, and sang. In order to successfully prevent hail, all *sngags pa* from Rogs ma, Bar rtsig, Pha gzhi, Gle ring, and Yang gle hamlets, gathered in a tent to chant the Khyung scripture. They held a *lab tse*<sup>25</sup> ritual to request A myes Srin po to protect village croplands from the four elemental disasters,<sup>26</sup> especially hail. During that day, almost all the men and boys from each village household went to Nyin ri Hill. When all had gathered, they made a *bsang* offering by burning juniper branches sprinkled with *rtsam pa*. At the same time, they planted large arrows in a cairn and threw *rlung rta* 'wind horses' to the sky.

During Dbyar ston, Gsang sgrog Monastery gave a sheep and one long arrow for the *lab tse*. Local people gathered at Nyin ri Hill and some young men were arranged to slaughter the sheep. The sheepskin was put on a wooden cross so that it faced the tent where the *sngags pa* chanted Khyung. When they finished chanting, *ser srung* took away the sheepskin. The arrow given by the monastery was placed in the center of the *lab tse*, surrounded by smaller arrows from hamlets or households.

Folk songs related to hail and *ser srung* were sung antiphonally especially during Dbyar ston. The songs in Tibetan

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<sup>25</sup> Long poles resembling arrows are upended in a heap of stones.

<sup>26</sup> Flooding, storms, hailstorms, and earthquakes.



script, Wylie transliteration, and English translation follow.

### Song One

ཞིང་བ།  
¹དགུང་སྟོན་པོ་འདྲ་བའི་གནས་ཁང་ཞིག།  
²འབྲུག་པོ་ཁྱུང་འདྲ་བའི་མགྲོན་པོ་ཞིག།  
³ཆར་ཟེལ་མ་འདྲ་བའི་བསུ་མ་ཞིག།  
⁴ངས་ཡང་ཡང་བསུ་བའི་སྟོན་ལམ་འདྲེབས།

Zhing ba/

¹Dgung sngon po 'dra ba'i gnas khang zhig/  
²brug pho chung 'dra ba'i mgon po zhig/  
³Char zil ma 'dra ba'i bsu ma zhig/  
⁴Ngas yang yang bsu ba'i smon lam 'debs//

Farmer:

¹A blue sky-like dwelling,  
²A fine dragon-like guest,  
³A soft rain-like greeting,  
⁴I pray that there may be such greetings again and again!

### Song Two

མེར་སྟུང་།  
¹དགུང་ཨ་སྟོན་དབྱིངས་ལ་འཇའ་གསུམ་ཤར།  
²སྟུན་ཤར་མ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གདན་ཟིག་བཏངས།  
³ཆར་ཟེལ་མ་འབབ་གི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་རེད།  
⁴འདི་མེར་སྟུང་སྟགས་པའི་བཀའ་བློན་ཡིན།

Ser srung /

¹Dgung a sngon dbyings la 'ja' gsum shar//  
²Sprin shar ma gnyis kyi gdan zig (zhig) btangs//  
³Char zil ma 'bab gi (pa'i) rten 'brel red//  
⁴'di ser srung sngags pa'i bka' drin yin//

*Ser srung*:

- <sup>1</sup>Three rainbows have appeared in the blue sky,  
<sup>2</sup>Two long clouds are laid out as felt.  
<sup>3</sup>An auspicious sign of the coming of light rain,  
<sup>4</sup>It's the benevolence of the tantric *ser srung*.

### Song Three

ཞིང་བ།  
<sup>1</sup>སྤྱོད་ཆེ་གི་ལྷ་སྤྱོད་ཆེ་བརྒྱད་དེས།  
<sup>2</sup>སྤྱོད་ནག་པོ་དགུང་ནས་དུག་དུས་སྤྱོད།  
<sup>3</sup>ཡིད་ལྷ་མོ་མེད་མེད་སྤྱོད་ཆེ།  
<sup>4</sup>མཐུ་ལྷ་པ་ཡིད་མེད་སྤྱོད་ཆེས།

Zhing ba/

- <sup>1</sup>Stobs che gi (ba'i) lha srin sde brgyad des//  
<sup>2</sup>Sprin nag po dgung nas dkrug dus su//  
<sup>3</sup>Phying zhwa mo gon gi (pa'i) ser srung khyod//  
<sup>4</sup>Mthu nus pa yod med su gis (yis) shes//

Farmer:

- <sup>1</sup>The powerful eight classes of deities and spirits,  
<sup>2</sup>As they stir up dark clouds in the sky.  
<sup>3</sup>You, the *ser srung* who is capped by a felt hat,  
<sup>4</sup>Who knows if you truly embody such powerful force?

### Song Four

མེར་སྤྱོད།  
<sup>1</sup>སྤྱོད་མེར་བ་བཞིན་དུ་དགུང་ནས་ཤོག།  
<sup>2</sup>ང་མེར་སྤྱོད་སྤྱགས་པ་ས་ནས་འདུག།  
<sup>3</sup>སྤྱོད་དུམ་བུ་གསུམ་གི་མ་བཏང་ན།  
<sup>4</sup>ང་མེར་སྤྱོད་སྤྱགས་པ་མེན་པའི་རྟགས།

Ser srung /

- <sup>1</sup>Khyod ser ba bzhin du dgung nas shog/  
<sup>2</sup>Nga ser srung sngags pa sa nas 'dug/

<sup>3</sup>Sprin dum bu gsum gi (du) ma btang (bgos) na//  
<sup>4</sup>Nga ser srung sngags pa min pa'i rtags//

*Ser srung:*

<sup>1</sup>You come like hailstones from the sky,  
<sup>2</sup>I, the *ser srung*, will stay on the earth.  
<sup>3</sup>If I fail to split the clouds into three,  
<sup>4</sup>It's proof that I, the *ser srung*, am not a *tāntrika*.

Song Five

ཞིང་བ།  
<sup>1</sup>ཞིང་རི་མ་སེར་ར་ཡོང་དུས་གི།  
<sup>2</sup>གནམ་བུ་ཡུག་སྐྱུ་མོ་དུལ་ལ་བསྐྱོད།  
<sup>3</sup>ས་སྐྱུང་ནག་རྩོག་སེར་བ་འཁྲིབས།  
<sup>4</sup>གྲོང་སེར་སྐྱུང་རིག་ན་སྤྱིང་རེ་རྗེ།

Zhing ba/

<sup>1</sup>Zhing ri ma ser ra (ba) yong dus gi (su)//  
<sup>2</sup>Gnam bu yug skya mo rdul la bskyod//  
<sup>3</sup>Sa mun nag rdo gi (yi) ser ba 'thibs//  
<sup>4</sup>Grong ser srung rig na snying re rje//

Farmer:

<sup>1</sup>When hail comes to the arid mountain fields,  
<sup>2</sup>The stormy sky is gorged with grey dust.  
<sup>3</sup>The gloomy earth is shrouded by hailstones,  
<sup>4</sup>It's then pathetic to see the village *ser srung*.

Song Six

སེར་སྐྱུང་།  
<sup>1</sup>དགུང་སྤྱི་བརྒྱད་སེར་བ་མ་དག་ན།  
<sup>2</sup>ད་སྐྱུང་ས་སེར་རྩོག་འཕམ་དོན་མེད།  
<sup>3</sup>ཁྱེད་སྤྱི་བརྒྱད་འཕུལ་གྱི་མཚོན་ཆ་གན།  
<sup>4</sup>གཙོག་འདྲིང་ན་གསང་སྐྱུང་ས་བཞུགས་བཞིན་ཡོད།

Ser srung /

<sup>1</sup>Dgung sde brgyad ser ba ma drag na//

<sup>2</sup>Nga sngags pas ser rde'u 'phen don med//

<sup>3</sup>Khyod sde brgyad 'phrul gyi mtshon cha gan//

<sup>4</sup>Gcog 'dod na gsang sngags bzlas brjod yod//

*Ser srung:*

<sup>1</sup>If the hailstorms of the eight classes of deities and spirits are too strong,

<sup>2</sup>There's no point for me, the t̃antrika, to throw the *ser rde'u*.

<sup>3</sup>The magic weapon of you, the eight classes of deities and spirits,

<sup>4</sup>I can wreak destruction by reciting secret mantras if I want to.

### Song Seven

ཞིང་བ།  
<sup>1</sup>སྒྲིན་ནག་པོ་བང་རིམ་སྐུམ་རྩེག་ཡོད།  
<sup>2</sup>བང་གོང་མའི་ནང་ན་སྒྲིབ་བྱུང་ཡོད།  
<sup>3</sup>བང་བར་མའི་ནང་ན་འབྲུག་རྒྱུང་ཡོད།  
<sup>4</sup>བང་ཞོལ་མའི་ནང་ན་སེར་ར་ཡོད།  
<sup>5</sup>རྒྱུང་སྒྲིབ་སེར་ཆར་གྱི་བསྐྱུ་མ་ཡིན།

Zhing ba/

<sup>1</sup>Sprin nag po bang rim sum rtseg yod//

<sup>2</sup>Bang gong ma'i nang na sde brgyad yod//

<sup>3</sup>Bang bar ma'i nang na 'brug chung yod//

<sup>4</sup>Bang zhol ma'i nang na ser ra (ba) yod//

<sup>5</sup>Rlung skyi bser char gi (gyi) bsu ma yin//

Farmer:

<sup>1</sup>The dark clouds have three layers.

<sup>2</sup>In the upper layer are the eight classes of deities and spirits.

<sup>3</sup>In the mid-layer are small dragons.

<sup>4</sup>In the lower layer are hailstones.

<sup>5</sup>A gentle breeze is a welcome sign of rain.

## Song Eight

སེར་སྤྱང་།  
<sup>1</sup>ང་སེར་སྤྱང་སྤང་ན་ཡོད་ཡོད་ལ།  
<sup>2</sup>འབྲུག་པོ་ཆུང་གན་གེ་ངར་ར་རྩོས།  
<sup>3</sup>ང་སེར་སྤྱང་སྤང་ན་མེད་ཀྱི་ན།  
<sup>4</sup>ཤིང་ཅི་རྩིས་ཆང་མ་རྒྱུ་ཅིས་རེད།  
<sup>5</sup>ཞིང་རི་ཞིས་ཆ་ཅིག་འབྲུར་ཅིས་རེད།

Ser srung /

<sup>1</sup>Nga ser srung sgang na yod yod la//  
<sup>2</sup>'brug pho chung gan gi (gyi) ngar ra (la) ltos//  
<sup>3</sup>Nga ser srung sgang na med kyi na//  
<sup>4</sup>Shing rtsi tog tshang ma rdung rtsis red//  
<sup>5</sup>Zhing ri zhis cha tsig ('ga' zhig) 'khur rtsis red//

*Ser srung:*

<sup>1</sup>Despite I, the *ser srung*, being atop the peak,  
<sup>2</sup>Just observe how vigorous the small dragon is.  
<sup>3</sup>If I, the *ser srung*, were not atop the peak,  
<sup>4</sup>All the trees and plants would be fated for destruction,  
<sup>5</sup>Several fields would be fated to be flooded.<sup>27</sup>

Villagers observed certain taboos while crops were growing to prevent hail from destroying crops. They did not herd cattle into fields or cut grass near fields. Villagers sometimes burned a few barley stalks in a field and ate the scorched grain as a snack while working, but did not leave burned stalks in the fields. Women did not go to fields without having recently washed their faces or hair and their hair had to be tied up. Women were also forbidden to pollute spring water by, for example, touching it with their hands when fetching water.

<sup>27</sup> These folk songs were provided by Rgya kar (b. 1949).

## WEATHER FORECASTING

According to *Preventing Hail*, *ser srung* forecast hail using dreams and by observing the sky, clouds, earth, lightning, the sound of thunder, and the location of falling sunbeams. Each is detailed below. Before a *ser srung* slept each night, he chanted a mantra 108 times, blew on water he poured into his hand, and drank it. This ritual imbued his dreams with prophetic power. In the list below, the first item indicates what might have appeared in the *ser srung*'s dream and the item following the arrow indicates what it signified:

- pigs, snakes, goats, or sheep eating crops → *nāga* will destroy crops with hail
- yaks eating crops → *bdud*<sup>28</sup> will destroy crops with hail
- horses eating crops → *btsan*<sup>29</sup> will destroy crops with hail
- insects eating crops → *gnod sbyin*<sup>30</sup> will destroy crops with hail
- women roasting grain → *ma mo*<sup>31</sup> will destroy crops with hail
- many gray people in the fields → *rgyal po*<sup>32</sup> will destroy crops with hail.
- snow covering the crops → *lha*<sup>33</sup> will destroy the crops with hail
- a *ser tho* → all eight classes of deities and spirits will destroy the crops with hail

The appearance of clouds, rainbows, and mountains are also indicators of hail, as shown in the list below:

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<sup>28</sup> A type of demon.

<sup>29</sup> A type of demon.

<sup>30</sup> A class of powerful guardian spirits that can both help and harm.

<sup>31</sup> A malevolent female spirit belonging to the eight classes of gods and spirits.

<sup>32</sup> *Rgyal po* spirits are 'king' spirits who manifest through anger.

<sup>33</sup> Worldly deities.

- red, black, or yellow clouds in the east → *btsan* will send hail
- three clouds resembling *kha btags*<sup>34</sup> → *mtsho sman*<sup>35</sup> will send hail
- three dark brown clouds in the south resembling *sa bdag*<sup>36</sup> → *bdud* will send hail
- clouds resembling armor in the west → *ma mo* will send hail
- a cloud resembling a sitting monkey in the north → *dkor bdag*<sup>37</sup> will send hail
- a red and blue cloud resembling a writhing snake → *klu* will send hail
- a cloud resembling a flaming torch → *the'u rang*<sup>38</sup> will send hail
- clouds resembling a monkey, yak, palm of the hand, or a black rag → hail will fall
- a rainbow or fast-moving clouds, despite a lack of wind in the western sky → hail will fall
- clouds like a brick wall in the south or west → hail will fall
- clouds from the east → it will be very difficult to prevent hail from falling
- clouds moving from west and north → hail will fall
- A ye Klu sman is surrounded by fog or clouds → the deity is wearing her hat and hail will soon fall

Lightning may also signal that hail will fall, as indicated by the following observed phenomena:

- distant lightning
- lightning clouds that thicken and gather

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<sup>34</sup> Silk scarves.

<sup>35</sup> A class of feminine spirits.

<sup>36</sup> Demons who dominate the soil and habitats connected with the earth.

<sup>37</sup> Owner of property, spirit who is custodian of images, for example, *Pe har rgyal po*.

<sup>38</sup> *The'u rang* is a white, multicolored, or black evil spirit that is often said to have only one leg or resemble a cat.

- lightning clouds that resemble running horses
- lightning may be red or pink, and red lightning accompanied by thunder, but without rain, portends hail if it continues for more than an hour

The location of sunbeams may also signal that hail will fall. The clouds are drinking water and hail will subsequently fall when sunbeams fall on the Yellow River.

Hail that falls in the morning is more disastrous than hail falling at night.

#### HAIL PREVENTION

A *ser srung* might have prevented hail for a country, a *phyogs khag*,<sup>39</sup> a hamlet, or even a family or clan.

All hail prevention rituals were held in the Skya nag Hill tantric hall. After donning his *chu phying*, the *ser srung* took his 'ur cha, *ser rde'u*, *rwa dung*, and box constructed of miniature daggers, to the roof of the tantric hall. After offering *bsang*, the *ser srung* blew the *rwa dung*.

*Preventing Hail* includes three methods for preventing hail – peaceful, neither peaceful nor forceful, and forceful methods. According to the peaceful method, the *ser srung* prepared tea, butter, liquor, *gser skyems*,<sup>40</sup> *mchod pa*, and *gtor ma* when thick, dark clouds formed and approached Skya rgya. These were offered to the eight classes of deities and spirits. He then prayed, imagining himself to be a very kind, compassionate person comparable to Shakyamuni Buddha, spoke kindly to the eight classes of deities and spirits, beseeching them not to destroy crops, and chanted:

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<sup>39</sup> A *phyogs khag* 'village confederation' consists of several hamlets.

<sup>40</sup> *Gser skyems* or 'golden drink' is an honorific word for 'pure' drinks, such as water, that are offered to protective deities.



<sup>1</sup>ཕྱེ།  
<sup>2</sup>དྲེགས་པ་ལ་སྤྱི་མཐུ་བོ་ཆེ།  
<sup>3</sup>ཐོག་འཇུག་གྲོག་གི་ཞིལ་དང་བཙོས།  
<sup>4</sup>འཇིགས་རྩེ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་དྲག་ལུ་ཅན།  
<sup>5</sup>དྲག་པོ་འི་དཔུང་གི་ཆེ་བ་མཐོང་དུ།  
<sup>6</sup>བདུང་ཕྱི་གཏེར་སྤྱེམས་མཆོད་པ་འབུལ།  
<sup>7</sup>བར་སྒྲིབ་ཁམས་ལ་དབང་བསྐྱར་བས།  
<sup>8</sup>ཁྱེན་པའི་ལུལ་ལམ་གར་ལང་བའི།  
<sup>9</sup>འདི་ན་གཅས་པའི་ཁམས་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུས།  
<sup>10</sup>ཐོག་ཐོག་སྤངས་ཤིང་འཇུག་གིས་སྐྱབས།  
<sup>11</sup>ཐོག་ཐོག་ཤིན་ཏུ་འཇིགས་ལགས་ཤིང་།  
<sup>12</sup>དྲག་པོ་འི་སྤྱི་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་དྲག་པོ་བས།  
<sup>13</sup>གཏེར་སྤྱེམས་མཆོད་པ་འདི་བཞེས་ལ།  
<sup>14</sup>དྲག་ལུ་ཆེན་པོ་འི་དཔུང་གི་ལམ།  
<sup>15</sup>འདི་རྩེ་ལ་བཏོད་གཞན་དུ་བསྐྱར།  
<sup>16</sup>ཐོག་ཏེར་ལམ་ལྷོ་དྲག་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ།  
<sup>17</sup>འདི་ན་གཅས་པའི་སྤྱི་ལྷོ་རྒྱུས།  
<sup>18</sup>ལྷལ་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་སྐྱབས་ཤིང་ཤིན་ཏུ།  
<sup>19</sup>ཞུ་རྒྱུ་པའི་དྲག་པོ་འབངས་ལྷན།  
<sup>20</sup>འཇིག་རྩེ་ན་དྲགས་པའི་མཆོད་སྤེལ།  
<sup>21</sup>དཔོངས་ཤིང་བྱམས་པར་མཆོད་ནས་གྲང་།  
<sup>22</sup>གདུག་པའི་ཆེ་འཕུལ་ཞི་བར་མཆོད།

<sup>1</sup>Kye/

<sup>2</sup>Dregs pa lha srin mthu bo che//

<sup>3</sup>Thog 'brug glog gi zil dang bcos//

<sup>4</sup>'jigs rung sku yi drag shul can//

<sup>5</sup>Drag po'i dpung gi che bstod du//

<sup>6</sup>Bdud rtsi gser skyems mchod pa 'bul//

<sup>7</sup>Bar snang khams la dbang bsgyur bas//

<sup>8</sup>Byon pa'i shul lam gar yang bde//

<sup>9</sup>'di na gnas pa'i nyams chung rnams//

<sup>10</sup>Glog gis sngangs shing 'brug gis skrag//

<sup>11</sup>Thog gis shin tu 'jigs lags shing //

<sup>12</sup>Drag po'i sku srid bzod dka' bas//

<sup>13</sup>Gser skyems mchod pa 'di bzhes la//

<sup>14</sup>Drag shul chen po'i dpung gi lam//

- <sup>15</sup>'di ru ma btod gzhan du bsgyur//  
<sup>16</sup>Thog ser lam sna dgra la gtod//  
<sup>17</sup>'di na gnas pa'i skye bo rnams//  
<sup>18</sup>Phyag na rdo rje'i skyabs song yin//  
<sup>19</sup>O rgyan pad+ma'i bka' 'bangs yin//  
<sup>20</sup>jig rten dregs pa'i mchod sde yin//  
<sup>21</sup>Dgongs shing byams par mdzad nas kyang //  
<sup>22</sup>Gdug pa'i cho 'phrul zhi bar mdzod//

<sup>1</sup>Kye<sup>41</sup>

- <sup>2</sup>Alas, haughty deities and spirits of great might,  
<sup>3</sup>With intimidating thunder and lightning,  
<sup>4</sup>(You) possess ferocious appearances.  
<sup>5</sup>In honor of the mighty ones,  
<sup>6</sup>Ambrosial *gser skyems* is offered,  
<sup>7</sup>Controlling the world of space,  
<sup>8</sup>All the trails (you) pass on remain safe.  
<sup>9</sup>The weak and helpless beings residing here are,  
<sup>10</sup>Threatened and petrified by thunder and lightning,  
<sup>11</sup>And even more terrified by thunderbolts,  
<sup>12</sup>The impact of the mighty ones is thus unendurable.  
<sup>13</sup>While enjoying the libations of *gser skyems*  
<sup>14</sup>Mighty ones! Do not make your way around here,  
<sup>15</sup>Make your way towards a place in another direction,  
<sup>16</sup>And target thunderbolts and hailstorms at your adversaries.  
<sup>17</sup>People residing in this place are,  
<sup>18</sup>Refugees of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi,  
<sup>19</sup>Followers of Padmasambhava of Uḍḍiyāna.  
<sup>20</sup>(This is) a place where offerings are made to supernatural forces,  
<sup>21</sup>Taking this into consideration with benevolence,  
<sup>22</sup>Please eliminate malicious magical forces.

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<sup>41</sup> A vocable.

He then silently chanted the mantra of the deity Rten 'brel snying bo while looking at the clouds and clapping his hands towards them.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>1</sup>སྐྱུ་རྒྱུ་འི་ཡུལ་ཕྱོགས་འདི་ལ་སེར་བའི་གཞོན་པ་བཅས་ཅད་བརློག་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག  
<sup>2</sup>མད་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག  
<sup>3</sup>ཞི་བར་གྱུར་ཅིག  
<sup>4</sup>རབ་ཏུ་ཞི་བར་གྱུར་ཅིག

<sup>1</sup>Skya rgya'i yul phyogs 'di la ser ba'i gnod pa thams cad bzlog par gyur cig

<sup>2</sup>Med par gyur cig

<sup>3</sup>Zhi bar gyur cig

<sup>4</sup>Rab tu zhi bar gyur cig

<sup>1</sup>May the damage of hail in the land of Skya rgya be blocked,

<sup>2</sup>May it become non-existent,

<sup>3</sup>May it become dissipated,

<sup>4</sup>May it become completely cleared.

If this attempt proved unsuccessful, the *ser srung* employed the second method, which was neither peaceful nor forceful. He prayed to and meditated on the deity Rta mgrin, visualizing himself as the deity. He also visualized that one of the ten wrathful ones was becoming angry and that fire was burning around the *ser tho* and spreading outwards until the black clouds were burned into white silk<sup>43</sup> and then left. While doing this, he pointed<sup>44</sup> at the clouds and clapped his hands towards them. He chanted Rta mgrin's mantra to destroy the clouds and hail:

<sup>42</sup> This was traditionally a method of expelling evil.

<sup>43</sup> White clouds.

<sup>44</sup> Pointing is traditionally considered rude and aggressive.

<sup>1</sup>ཨྀ་ཏི་ས་ར་ཁུའ་ཕཎ  
<sup>2</sup>ན་ག་ཤ་ན་ག་ཐེད་ཐེད  
<sup>3</sup>མྱི་མ་ར་ཡ་ནན་སྣ་ཏྲ

<sup>1</sup>oM ti sa ra hUM phaT  
<sup>2</sup>na ga sha na ga thed thed  
<sup>3</sup>hri ma ra ya nan swA hA

If thick, dark clouds increased, he visualized a wrathful form of Rta mgrin and imagined a great wind blowing from his *sdigs mdzub*,<sup>45</sup> repelling the dark clouds to a distant mountain peak or into the Yellow River. He then chanted the following while blowing at the dark clouds:

<sup>1</sup>ཨྀ་ལྷ་ར་ལྷ་ར་།  
<sup>2</sup>ཆེ་ར་ཆེ་ར་།  
<sup>3</sup>རྩུ་ར་རྩུ་ར་།  
<sup>4</sup>ཤག་ཤག་།  
<sup>5</sup>ཐུན་ཐུན་།  
<sup>6</sup>བད་བད་།

<sup>1</sup>oM lhang lhang  
<sup>2</sup>tsher tsher  
<sup>3</sup>hur hur  
<sup>4</sup>shag shag  
<sup>5</sup>thun thun  
<sup>6</sup>rbad rbad

If clouds continued to gather, the *ser srung* used the forceful method. He burned *dug rdzas* to make smoke and harm the eight classes of deities and spirits, thus forcing them to stop. If he was still unable to defeat them and hail began falling, he tossed poison into the clouds and used his *'ur cha* to fire *ser rde'u* at the clouds while

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<sup>45</sup> A threatening tantric posture of the hand.

chanting Rta mgrin's mantra. He meanwhile visualized himself as the most wrathful form of Rta mgrin and visualized small daggers shooting into the dark hail clouds, where the eight classes of deities and spirits were either killed or fled. Meanwhile, if the *ser srung*'s lay friends were present they might have shouted loudly to assist him, shot flaming arrows, fired guns at the clouds, or beat drums.

*Ser srung* had another method of hail prevention when hail approached. Since hail is caused by the eight classes of deities and spirits, *ser srung* divined to learn where they were on a given day, within the eight directions (north, east, west, south, southeast, southwest, northwest, and northeast). Once located, he set up a *ser tho* facing the eight classes of deities and spirits in that section of village territory. He might also have set ten *ser tho* in village fields representing the ten wrathful ones. Eight were for the eight directions, and one *ser tho* was constructed to guard against deities in the upper realm, while another guarded against deities in the lower realm. He meanwhile chanted a wrathful mantra to increase the power of all the *ser tho*. In his left hand he held a frog whose mouth faced the direction of the dark hail clouds and in his right hand he twirled his 'ur cha. If this was unsuccessful and hail fell, he put *ser rde'u* in the sling and shot them towards the dark clouds, and might also have blown his *rwa dung*. He might also have put a flat stone on the ground – a stone taken from the Skya rgya sky burial site, or from a riverbank and left in the sky burial site for days, weeks, months, or even years.

Another method used to prevent hail was to visualize Rta mgrin again and imagine each hailstone as an arrow, the wind as a bow, and clouds as a black tent. The *ser srung* then chanted scriptures and mantras to imagine he had destroyed the arrows, bow, and tent.

The last hail-prevention method involved constructing a female effigy from red clay and painting it black. An arrow,

arrowhead of *skyer ba*, and a bow of *tsher ma*<sup>46</sup> were made. The arrowhead was a triangular-based pyramid painted with blood mixed with poison. The arrow feather was from a *khwa ta* 'jackdaw' and the bowstring was threaded from widows' hair in a counterclockwise direction. This effigy was placed with the bow and arrow placed in its hands in the field where it often hailed, so that it appeared to be shooting an arrow in the direction hail usually came. A mantra written on a paper was placed in the arrow notch. The *ser srung* chanted tantra and mantra to empower these items.

Powerful *ser srung* did not need to undertake such complex rituals because they could stop hail with the power of their mantra alone. Furthermore, the *chu phying*, 'ur cha, *ser rde'u*, and *ser 'khor* taken from Sakya Pandita's family are thought to have great intrinsic power. If the *ser srung* was busy, he might have left these items onto the roof of the tantric house on Skya nag Hill, and the power of these implements alone would stop hail, even though the *ser srung* was not present.

## PAYMENT

Every Skya rgya household paid *ser srung* in barley and grain until the time of Bsam gtan rgya mtsho. Often two of the *ser srung*'s family members visited each Skya rgya household at harvest time with a sack and wooden basin loaded on a mule and filled the basin with barley. If villagers heard that the family was collecting *ser 'bru* at a certain household, they brought barley there. Collectors also sometimes came to the *ma Ni khang* where all villagers gathered to pay *ser 'bru*, which was often collected for more than a month. Households that owned no farmland and worked for other families did not pay *ser 'bru*. There were more than 200 households in Skya rgya during Bla ma tshe ring's period, thus about 200 basins of barley were collected annually for *ser srung*.

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<sup>46</sup> *Tsher ma* is a general term for thorns and thorny plants.

This changed during Bsam gtan rgya mtsho's lifetime, when each hamlet leader began to collect *ser 'bru* and give it to the *ser srung*. Some hamlets gave less *ser 'bru* to *ser srung* than before. Later, some villagers stopped giving *ser 'bru*, primarily because Bsam gtan rgya mtsho lacked *gdams pa'i rgyud pa* and was thus not recognized as a true *ser srung*.

## CONCLUSION

Hail prevention rituals and the role of *ser srung* have an extended history in Skya rgya, as indicated by Ser tho Hill where *ser tho* were built and hail prevention rituals held. *Ser srung* in Skya rgya may be directly traced to Sakya Pandita's family. In 2011, local elders remained convinced of the power of *ser srung* and their ability to prevent hail from devastating crops. However, after 1958, dramatic changes in Skya rgya and other Tibetan areas drastically altered people's lives and beliefs, and resulted in the disappearance of such rituals as hail prevention.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Jam dbyangs dpang phyug འཇམ་དབྱངས་དཔང་ཕྱུག  
'Jigs byed འཇིགས་བྱེད།  
'ur cha ལུ་ཅ།

A

A 'byung ཨ་འབྱུང།  
A ye Klu sman ཨ་ཡེ་ཀུ་སྐྱུ་སྐྱོ།  
A myes Brag dkar ཨ་མྱེས་བྲག་དཀར།  
A myes Srin po ཨ་མྱེས་སྤོན་པོ།

B

Bar rtsig བར་རྩི  
bdud བདུད།  
Bka' gyur བཀའ་འགྱུར།  
bla ma བླ་མ།  
Bla ma tshe ring བླ་མ་ཚེ་རིང་།  
Bsam gtan rgya mtsho བསམ་གཏན་རྒྱ་མཚོ།  
bsang བསང་།  
bsnyen pa བསྟེན་པ།  
Bstan 'gyur བསྟན་འགྱུར།  
btsan བཅོན།  
Bya rgyal khyung བྱ་རྒྱལ་ཀྱུང་།

C

Chos dar ཚོས་དར།  
Chos 'khor ཚོས་འཁོར།  
Chos 'khur ཚོས་འཁུར།  
chu phying རྩུ་ཕྱིང་།

D

Da ru ཌ་རུ།  
Dbyar ston དབྱར་སྟོན།  
dkor bdag དཀོར་བདག་  
dril bu འིལ་བུ།  
Do rgya ཌོ་རྒྱ།  
dug rdzas དུག་རྩ་ས།



G

*Ga'u* གཤུ།  
*Gcan tsha* གཅན་ཚ།  
*gdams pa* གདམས་པ།  
*gdams pa'i rgyud pa* གདམས་པའི་རྒྱུད་པ།  
*Gdugs dkar* གདུགས་དཀར།  
*Gle ring* གླེ་རིང་།  
*Gle zhol* གླེ་ཞོ།  
*Gnam steng* གནམ་སྟེང་།  
*gnod sbyin* གནོད་སྦྱིན།  
*Gsang bdag* གསང་བདག་།  
*Gsang sgrog* གསང་སྟོག་།  
*gser skyems* གསེར་སྦྱེམས།  
*gtor ma* གཏོར་མ།  
*Guinan* 贵南  
*gzhi bdag* གཞི་བདག་།

H

*Henan* 河南  
*Huangnan* 黄南

J

*Jiajia* 贾加  
*Jianzha* 尖扎

K

*kha btags* ཁ་བརྟགས།  
*Kha smad* ཁ་སྦྱང།  
*Kha stod* ཁ་སྟོད།  
*khro bo bcu* ཁྲོ་བོ་བཅུ།  
*khwa ta* ཁྲ།  
*Khyung* རྒྱུང་།  
*klu* ལུ།

L

*lab tse* ལཔ་ཙེ།  
*Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje* ལུང་སྐྱའོ་ལ་པའི་རོ་རྟེ།  
*Lha ri* ལྷ་རི།

*lha sde* ལྷ་སྡེ།  
*lha srin sde brgyad* ལྷ་སྤྱིན་སྡེ་བརྒྱད། M

*ma mo* མ་མོ།  
 Ma nang a lags མ་ནང་ཨ་ལགས།  
 Ma ri tsi མ་རི་ཙི།  
 Mang ra མང་ར།  
*mchod pa* མཚོད་པ།  
 Mgon po brag nag མགོན་པོ་བླ་མ་ནག  
*mnan pa* མནན་པ།  
 Mo gzu མོ་གཟུ།  
*mtsho sman* མཚོ་སྐྱོན།  
 Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

O  
 oM ma ni pad me h+UM ཨོཾ་མ་ནི་པད་མེ་ཏཱྃ།  
 P

Pha gzhi ཕ་གཞི།  
*phyogs khag* ཕྱགས་ཁག Q

Qinghai 青海 R

*ra dung* ར་དུང་།  
*rdo rje* རོ་རྗེ།  
*rdzongs pa* རྫོངས་པ།  
 Rgya kar རྒྱ་ར།  
 Rgyal stong ba རྒྱལ་སྟོང་བ།  
 Rin chen chos gling རིན་ཆེན་ཆོས་གླིང་།  
*rlung rta* རླུང་རྟ།  
 Rma lho ར་ལྷོ།  
 Rog ma རོག་མ།  
 Rta mgrin ར་མགྲིན།

Rta mgrin gsang sgrub kyi sgo nas ser ba srung ba'i gdam pa me long  
 'khrug pa'i gur khang ར་མགྲིན་གསང་སྦྱབ་བྱིས་མེར་བ་སྦྱང་བའི་གདམ་པ་མེ་ལོང་  
 འཁྱུག་པའི་གུར་ཁང་།

*rtags* རྟགས།  
*rtsam pa* རྩམ་པ།

S

*sa bdag* ས་བདག།  
*Sa pan* ས་པན།  
*Sakya Pandita* ས་སྐྱ་པཎ্ডིཏ།  
*ser 'bru* ཤེར་འབྲུ།  
*ser 'khor* ཤེར་འཁོར།  
*ser rde'u* ཤེར་རྟེ་འུ།  
*ser srung* ཤེར་སྤྱང་།  
*ser tho* ཤེར་ཐོ།  
*sgrub pa* སྤྱབ་པ།  
*Shag kya* ཤག་ཀྱ།  
*Shing lu'u* ཤིང་ལུ་འུ།  
*Ska phug* སྐ་ཕུག།  
*Skya nag* སྐ་ནག།  
*Skya rgya* སྐ་རྒྱ།  
*skyer ba* སྐེར་བ།  
*sngags pa* སྔགས་པ།  
*srung ma* སྤྱང་མ།

T

*thang ka* ཐང་ཀ།  
*the'u rang* ཐེ་འུ་རང་།  
*tsher ma* ཐེར་མ།

Y

*Yang gle* ཡང་གླེ།



# PYRAMID SCHEMES ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

Devin Gonier (Qinghai Normal University) and  
Rgyal yum sgrol ma (Qinghai Normal University)

## ABSTRACT

The unique features of pyramid shemes and certain underlying causes for their development on the Tibetan Plateau are analyzed. Research was conducted by analyzing 521 surveys, allowing estimation of pyramid scheme activity on the Plateau and an identification of related cultural and social specificities. Firsthand accounts were collected revealing details of personal involvement. Survey data and similarities in the accounts were studied to suggest how involvement in pyramid schemes might be reduced at both institutional and individual levels.

## KEYWORDS

education in Tibet, job market in Tibetan areas, pyramid schemes, resettlement, Tibetan Plateau

### INTRODUCTION

The Tibetan Plateau is currently undergoing dramatic economic change, driven largely by the government's desire to modernize Tibet and balance the disparity between China's coastal and inland marketplaces. The accelerating drive towards a market economy in western China has separated many Tibetans from their traditional subsistence lifestyle. Younger generations on the Tibetan Plateau are thus increasingly vulnerable to pyramid scheme involvement because of a strong desire for employment beyond the subsistence sector, poorly developed job acquisition skills, and limited education that leads to bleak career prospects.

We analyze key factors in the growing success of pyramid schemes on the Tibetan Plateau. We also discuss the general situation of pyramid schemes in China and how the government regulates them, examine conditions that are reshaping Tibetan lifestyles, provide and review seven narrative accounts of involvement in pyramid schemes, and offer suggestions on institutional reforms that might limit personal involvement in pyramid schemes. We also make suggestions on how to avoid pyramid scheme traps.

### PYRAMID SCHEMES IN CHINA

Pyramid schemes began booming in China in the mid 1990s, when the economic base shifted from small-scale agriculture requiring little formal schooling, to one placing greater emphasis on workforce positions in domestic and international business that require formal educational qualifications.<sup>1</sup> Vause (2009) estimates that over ten million people in China are currently involved in pyramid schemes.<sup>2</sup>

Pyramid schemes in China have certain unique features when compared to the US, where they are largely based on inventory loading. This technique requires a new recruit to buy a large

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/money/world/2009-09-07-chinafraud\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/world/2009-09-07-chinafraud_N.htm), accessed 15 April 2012.

<sup>2</sup> [http://articles.cnn.com/2009-11-29/world/china.pyramid.cult\\_1\\_pyramid-schemes-new-investors-cult?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2009-11-29/world/china.pyramid.cult_1_pyramid-schemes-new-investors-cult?_s=PM:WORLD), accessed 17 April 2012.

inventory of goods to sell as a condition of employment.<sup>3</sup> Once the goods have been purchased, the recruit is encouraged to find new members, and receives a bonus for each new member they find. Instead of receiving a salary, new members who purchase the large inventory of goods generate income by selling their inventory or from bonuses received from finding new members. Since the goods they purchased in the original inventory are not easily sold, very few goods ever actually make it to market, and new members therefore must find new members in order to cover their losses from the original investment.

Pyramid schemes in the US have become increasingly common on the internet, which removes much of the costs associated with recruitment and marketing. Now, "scam artists can establish and maintain a site on the World Wide Web for \$30 a month or less, and solicit anyone in the world with Internet access."<sup>4</sup> This removes postage and travel costs.

Inventory loading is less common in China, where fear and forced confinement by pyramid scheme leaders predominate. The internet is also used less in recruitment than in the US, where it is rare for pyramid scheme victims to be required to move or threatened by employers. In China, victims are typically taken to remote places for training and work. Upon arrival, their cell phones and, in some cases, ID cards are taken. Participants are assigned rooms that they must keep neat. The activities at the 'military-style' dorm locations usually focus on classes and lectures intended to create an unquestioning belief in the fabrications presented by the organization.<sup>5</sup>

Participants are encouraged to feel highly integrated with other participants, who often sing, play games, eat, and listen to motivational lectures together. These activities contribute to a feeling of belonging to a community, which makes the prospect of receiving a return on investment easier to believe. Those who join these schemes and begin to realize that they are fake may try to leave, but are told

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ftc.gov/speeches/other/dvimf16.shtm>, accessed 15 April 2012.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ftc.gov/speeches/other/dvimf16.shtm>, accessed 15 April 2012.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ftc.gov/speeches/other/dvimf16.shtm>, accessed 15 April 2012.

that they cannot. In some cases, pyramid scheme operators threaten to harm the family members of participants who attempt to leave.

To enhance the scheme's apparent legitimacy, it is common for schemes to reference such important people as Hillary Clinton<sup>6</sup> or Deng Xiaoping.<sup>7</sup> Pyramid scheme operators usually argue that famous and important people became powerful and rich through organizations like theirs. In some cases, they argue that the Chinese government supports organizations like Amway<sup>8</sup> and, therefore, supports their organization. Sometimes schemers admit that their work is not legal by saying, for example, that their organization is "in a gray area and not yet legal. Once legalized, it wouldn't be so profitable, but right now you could make profits of 60 percent."<sup>9</sup>

Pyramid schemes have had extraordinary success in China. In 2008, "a fertilizer scam conned 380,000 people. In 2007, a cosmetics fraud involved half a million people."<sup>10</sup> The Chinese government made participation in pyramid schemes a punishable crime in 1998 and founded a program called the Anti-Pyramid Scheme Office, which locates and closes these organizations.<sup>11</sup> Hayes mentions two cases where people have been executed for involvement in pyramid schemes. One case was "in February 2007," when "a businessman named Wang Zhendeng, was sentenced to death for swindling 36,000 investors in twelve towns in northeastern Liaoning Province," and another in "August 2009," when:

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ftc.gov/speeches/other/dvimf16.shtm>, accessed 15 April 2012.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99493406>, accessed 19 April 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Amway is an international company that recruits employees to invest in selling different products. Each new employee usually takes on a certain amount of risk, because their salary is proportional to the amount they sell. In some cases, people may lose their original investment if they do not sell the items that they purchased from Amway. Amway employees can generally make a living by selling Amway products, unlike pyramid schemes which are designed to profit high ranking employees.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99493406>, accessed 19 April 2012.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99493406>, accessed 19 April 2012.

<sup>11</sup> [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2011-03/21/content\\_12203994.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2011-03/21/content_12203994.htm), accessed 15 April 2012.



two businessmen charged with defrauding hundreds of investors of more than \$127 million were executed. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence saying, the businessmen had 'seriously damaged the country's financial regulatory order and social stability.'<sup>12</sup>

Information about schemes is often difficult to find and verify. People who were scammed by pyramid schemes are typically unwilling to talk about their experience because they are embarrassed, or because they worry that they might be punished for being involved. Despite these challenges, "the State Administration of Industry and Commerce broke up 10,980 pyramid schemes between 2006 and September 2009."<sup>13</sup> In 2006, a non-governmental organization called the China Anti-Pyramid Selling Association was created by former victims of pyramid schemes. This group currently tries to locate pyramid schemes and helps victims escape them. In one case, a man working for such an organization was stabbed by both the victim and the scheme worker for his attempt at intervention.<sup>14</sup>

#### PYRAMID SCHEMES ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

To investigate the impact of pyramid schemes on the Tibetan Plateau, we administered 521 surveys to senior middle school and university students in Xining City and Tongren Town in Qinghai Province. This cohort was chosen because such people are more actively seeking employment outside the subsistence sector. Students surveyed came from throughout China, but the vast majority were from Qinghai. The two statistically significant ethnicities surveyed were Tibetans (271) and Han Chinese (192). Although members of other ethnicities were surveyed (Mongol, Hui, Lisu, Bai, Miao, Mongour [Tu], and others), the numbers were statistically insignificant. Since all participants were students, and most were university students, there were limiting

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<sup>12</sup> <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=302>, accessed 16 April 2012.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.patrickpretty.com>, accessed 18 April 2012.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.patrickpretty.com>, accessed 18 April 2012.

factors, e.g., the average age was only twenty-one and the majority of participants were in their early twenties. Furthermore, all surveys were done in Xining and Tongren. It was impossible to accurately assess the socioeconomic factors that might impact participants from particular villages or townships.

Our research suggests three primary factors for the success of pyramid schemes in Western China: a strong need for employment beyond the subsistence sector, poor development of job acquisition techniques, and poor education and career path development.

Sixty percent of the Tibetan respondents described their parents' main source of income as farming, herding, or caterpillar fungus.<sup>15</sup> None of the Han respondents claimed caterpillar fungus or herding as a major source of income, and only twenty-six percent listed farming as a major income source. These indicators emphasize that the economies of these two groups are significantly different.

FIGURE 1. Major sources of income.

Ethnicity	Business	Teaching	Science	Farming	Herding	Government Work	Migrant Labor	Caterpillar Fungus	Other
Tibetan	10%	7%	1%	35%	19%	7%	11%	6%	3%
Han	18%	6%	3%	26%	0%	10%	18%	0%	19%

Recent changes in China's political and economic landscape have profoundly impacted the overall profitability and sustainability of farming for most Tibetans. Goldstein et al. (2008) note five reasons for a strong push towards finding income outside the farming environment. The first two are the consequence of farmers not technically owning land, but rather leasing it from the government. Since land cannot be bought or sold it is difficult to expand land, and far more likely that land is lost to public projects like road building

<sup>15</sup> A fungus that grows in and eventually kills certain caterpillars. It is dug seasonally on the Tibetan Plateau and sold for high prices as a medicinal substance.

and the construction of new houses. The third is disproportionate inflation affecting the price of products that farmers purchase, but not the price of goods they sell. This increases basic living needs beyond the return on the goods farmers sell. Fourth, the accelerating movement towards a market-based economy in China has removed much-needed subsidies and increased the overall costs of such public necessities as healthcare and schooling. Finally, farmers cannot increase yields, as explained by Goldstein et al. (2008:519-520):

[V]illagers were already using new high yield strains of winter wheat and heavy applications of chemical fertilizers and insecticides and there was virtually no 'virgin' land that could be opened to increase production.

These factors encourage children to leave farms and find work elsewhere. Goldstein et al. (2008:519-520) note that, "In Norgyong [a village in his study] the number of households with at least one member earning income grew from 43% in 1997 to 90% in 2005, an increase of 110%."

For families whose primary income comes from pastoralism, recent changes to the pastoral lifestyle have also affected the success of pyramid schemes. There have been three sedentarization programs: Turning Pastureland Into Grassland, Ecological Resettlement, and Nomadic Resettlement, whose primary aim, according to state discourse is to "bring the poor west up to the affluent standard of the east" and to "monitor the grassland conditions and to assure a restoration of the grassland vegetation" (Ptackova 2012:229). These programs offer herding families the opportunity to adopt an urban lifestyle by providing annual stipends and subsidies on housing projects. In most cases, poor families with few animals are initially attracted to these programs. In order to participate, families must sell their livestock and waive most of their rights to the grasslands. However, after "giving up the land and livestock which formerly provided much of their subsistence needs, their daily costs for basic needs rise enormously," and pastoralists soon realize that "everything must be purchased with cash," and "their modest government subsidy cannot cover daily expenditures" (Ptackova 2012:229).

Resettled pastoralists thus need to find alternative sources of income. The original sedentarization plan included providing vocational training to help with the transition in finding new jobs. Ptackova (2012:228) notes that:

the implementation reports by local governments often conceded that the available funds are not sufficient to cover necessary costs for the vocational training of resettled pastoralists, nor for establishing the required capital investments to enable them to start new businesses. The insufficient funding even causes shortfalls to the formally scheduled subsidies.

Since newly resettled families lack investment capital from the government, they must use "their own saving as investment capital or seek work at state construction sites in the region" (Ptackova 2012:228). As will be noted later, competition for construction jobs can be fierce, especially because the migrant workers with whom pastoralists compete generally speak Chinese much better than the pastoralists. This situation puts resettled families in the vulnerable position of using their remaining capital for new investments, hopefully resulting in income. Furthermore, the job market is inhospitable to resettled herders, whose skills relate only to herding.

These strong shifts in economic livelihood have created problems that prove advantageous to pyramid schemes throughout the region. The need to find jobs outside the village is unprecedented for many young people and the extent to which they can receive informed advice from their family and school is insufficient to provide the awareness needed to avoid pyramid schemes.

The first problem is in the initial search for a new job. Goldstein et al. (2008: 522) note that:

there are no organized government or private programs to help rural villagers find work, so each household has to arrange its own jobs. This is commonly done through friends, relatives, subcontractors, and contacts from previous job sites.

In the surveys distributed, thirty-five percent of Tibetan participants claimed that their first resource for finding a new job was friends and

family and the second most common way (twenty-eight percent) was to walk around town. In contrast, the most common way for Han Chinese to find new jobs was to use the Internet (thirty-four percent).<sup>16</sup> In all of the accounts that follow, victims became involved in pyramid schemes through a friend or relative.

The statistical prevalence of searching for jobs through friends and family members among Tibetan participants is problematic because pyramid schemers typically begin recruitment with friends and family who are looking for employment. In Account Two, for example, a pyramid scheme demanded that a new recruit call all friends and family members who might be looking for work. Finding jobs through close contact networks is commonplace and thus is not viewed as suspicious, and results in higher recruitment rates.

A second issue is the perception that jobs requiring investment are more profitable, and that it is acceptable to make an initial investment for a job. The most common manifestation of this has been noted in the rapidly increasing trend of purchasing trucks for work. Goldstein et al. (2008:530) note that the "shift in thinking toward more capital-intensive means for improving one's economic standing" is largely facilitated by:

the Agricultural Bank of China (ABC), which is providing households with easy credit for capital investments as well as private improvement projects such as building new homes or renovating old houses. Many households now have ABC lines of credit that allow them to get loans quickly and without guarantors. A 'gold line of credit' allows a household to get 30,000 Yuan (\$3,947).

In our survey, ten percent of Tibetan participants said that it was acceptable to pay an initial investment for some jobs, and eight percent of Tibetan participants said that it was acceptable to pay an initial investment for any job.

Finally, Tibetans generally lack information about pyramid schemes, which helps explain the success of such schemes. In our

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<sup>16</sup> The Internet is also a potential source for pyramid scheme recruitment. However, it seems much more common for people to embrace pyramid schemes if friends or relatives make the suggestion.

survey, only twenty-six percent of Tibetan participants said they knew what a pyramid scheme was, sixty-three percent said that they had heard the term before but did not know what it was, and ten percent said they had never heard the term before.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that forty-seven percent of Han Chinese participants, almost twice the amount of Tibetans, were aware of pyramid schemes. Furthermore, among both Han Chinese and Tibetan groups, people were least likely to learn about pyramid schemes from school, suggesting that education about pyramid schemes could be incorporated in the classroom. It is also notable that there is a significant difference between Tibetans and Han Chinese in terms of learning about pyramid schemes from reading. This suggests a need for more Tibetan-language articles warning young Tibetans about the dangers of pyramid schemes.

FIGURE 2.

	Know about pyramid schemes	Do not know about pyramid schemes	Only heard the term
Tibetan	26%	10%	63%
Han	47%	4%	49%

FIGURE 3.<sup>18</sup>

	Learned from:			
	Family	friends	school	reading
Tibetan	6%	11%	4%	4%
Han	9%	12%	2%	23%

In addition to the educational problems contributing to the success of pyramid schemes, other factors are created by constraints on Tibetan employment availability. With reduced job availability, those seeking employment are more desperate to find jobs and are thus more likely to believe the representations of pyramid schemers.

<sup>17</sup> Language was not a possible reason for not knowing what a pyramid scheme was, because the word was translated for participants into Chinese, Tibetan, and English.

<sup>18</sup> Figure 3 adds up to less than one hundred percent because it only includes people who claimed to know about pyramid schemes.

Wang (2007) suggests that the lack of job opportunities is not caused by a lack of economic investment in the region, but by the "unrestricted influx of non-Tibetan migrant laborers" (Wang 2007:135). Outsiders are more successful than locals because, first, education in western China places heavy emphasis on tests and less emphasis on practical skills. Second, the move towards a more market-based economy in China has "increased the competitiveness of the job market and the poor economic situation in Tibetan areas of China has not created sufficient job opportunities for graduates" (Wang 2007:135). The third and perhaps most problematic reason is the significant language barrier between locals and contractors, who prefer to employ Chinese-speakers (Wang 2007:140). These problems create an environment where finding an outside job is increasingly difficult and young people are more easily persuaded by deceptive claims to quick and easy wealth through employment in pyramid schemes.

Tibetan farmers find that agricultural income is increasingly insufficient to meet their needs. For farmers, market forces affecting the overall profitability of selling crops and limitations on growth push younger people within the family to find non-farm work. State-sponsored sedentarization programs have proletarianized many pastoralists. As a result, newly relocated families are put in a desperate situation where they must find jobs in an inhospitable market without relevant practical skills. The desperate need to find jobs in a highly competitive marketplace, the failure of education to prepare graduates to compete in the job market, the acceptability of using investments for a new job, and the predominance of finding jobs through personal networks contribute to Tibetans' susceptibility to pyramid schemes.

#### NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS FROM PYRAMID SCHEME VICTIMS

The following seven accounts about victims of pyramid schemes throughout western China were originally recorded in Tibetan or Chinese and then translated into English.

Account One (male, b. ~1992, Deqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province).

I ran a small store in Shangri-la. I was very interested in skating and wanted to find some friends to start a club. One day some youths came to my shop and asked me about skating. They seemed really interested in it. Since we had the same interest, we became friends. Later, they asked me to hang out with them, and we started seeing each other every day. They told me that they were working for a company, but didn't explain clearly what the company did. One day I asked them again about their job, and they told me not to worry, that they weren't doing anything illegal. But when they answered my question they seemed nervous.

One day they called me to have dinner at their home. I was shocked to see that twenty people were living in a cramped flat. There were old people, youths, and even children. They all seemed happy to see me. We had dinner together, and they asked if I knew anyone from the Industry and Commerce Department. They said they needed such people to help them sell their goods efficiently. I got a strange feeling from them; I still didn't know what they were actually doing.

Later they called me again and said that there was a very important meeting and that they wanted me to attend. They led me into a big hall next to their home where I saw slogans on the wall like, "Let's struggle to achieve our dreams." They said the hall was their meeting spot. After a few minutes, a man around forty came to the center of the hall and began telling his story. He explained step-by-step how he had earned money and how successful he now was. He said that we could earn as much money as we wanted. I was really impressed by his speech.

I stayed with those people in Shangri-la for almost two years. Throughout that entire time I didn't understand what I was doing. People there told me to invite my friends so that I could promote the business and earn more money. Then I began to hunt for people. In total I invited four college friends. I thought I would earn something, but in fact I got nothing. I couldn't accept that, and wanted to leave, but they said that I couldn't leave and, if I tried to escape, I would be in danger.

Finally, I realized that I was involved in a pyramid scheme and was able to escape. I lied to them, pretending that I was going to hunt for another victim. I told them that the person I



planned on recruiting was waiting for me at the bus station. I had gained their trust and they didn't ask me any questions, thus I was able to escape. Then, I went to the police and told them everything.

Account Two (male, b. 1979, Xiahe County, Gansu Province).

I'm a tour guide. In 2006 I met my first love – a woman from Anhui Province. Though we lived apart we stayed in touch. On 5 June 2007, my girlfriend phoned me and said she wanted me to meet her parents and stay there for a few days. I then took a train to Anhui. My girlfriend met me and told me that she lived nearby with her brother. I went with her to a very small apartment on the third floor and entered a small room. There were one girl and thirteen men in a cramped room. They welcomed me with hugs. Something seemed really strange about it all.

I realized that my girlfriend had deceived me after a few minutes. When I tried to find her, she had vanished. I felt so hopeless. One of the young men came to me and said, "We didn't mean to trick you. We're trying to help you. You can earn a lot of money here." I replied that I wouldn't stay and do illegal things. They became angry. I stood and tried to leave, but they blocked my path. I pushed them away and tried to find a way to escape, but they rushed at me and grabbed me by my neck. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't move. I was forced to stay there for a few days.

Each room had a boss that every member needed to obey. The boss ate first at the beginning of every meal and then they followed. The members had to do whatever the boss ordered. They said that their company sold cosmetics and other goods, and that you needed to pay 2,800 RMB to be a member.

We only had two meals a day, and every member, except for the newcomers, had to pay six RMB per day as board. We had to attend brainwashing classes three hours daily during which they talked about issues related to money. By my sixth day there, I couldn't resist anymore. I decided to join and find a solution later. That night I told the boss that I wanted to join them. The next day I got money from the bank and paid a membership fee. I got nothing in return except a small piece of paper with my name on it. Then they told me that I should call my family, so I took the

phone quickly and called my mother. I told her that I was with a friend and not to worry, then they forced me to hang up.

Later on, they taught me how to deceive people. First, they told me to list my friends' and cousins' names. Then they asked me about their personalities and current jobs. Later they chose some names and told me to call them. I had no choice since they kept forcing me. So, I called one of my cousins and one of my friends. They both became involved in the end.

I still hadn't given up. I told myself that I needed to leave. I tried to contact the police secretly, but I didn't know my exact location. I eventually managed to escape late one night by jumping from the toilet window. I rushed away as fast as I could and luckily found a taxi and left that place. I had stayed there for almost three months. It was a nightmare. I can still see those unfamiliar faces.

Account Three (female, b. 1989, Lha sa City, Tibet Autonomous Region).

I didn't get a job after I graduated from Tibet University where I majored in Tibetan Language and Literature. I was pressured because most of my friends quickly found jobs. I tried to find jobs on the Internet and in newspapers. Once when I was looking for a job on the Internet, I met a college friend who told me that she had found a job in Shenzhen and the company where she worked was really good. She recommended the company and said that she would help me get a job. I didn't care much about the job but really wanted to see her because we hadn't met for several years. I decided to visit her and took a train directly there. She met me and we had a long conversation on the way to her apartment. When we were about to arrive, she said that she lived with her colleagues – boys and girls all lived together. I said that was fine. After half an hour we arrived and, since I was tired, I went straight to sleep.

The next morning, I saw that my friend hadn't gone to work. When I asked her why, she said that she had permission from the boss, because she wanted to look after me. I felt happy and touched. She took me to see the beautiful scenes of Shenzhen. We hung out for a long time and then returned. When we knocked on the door, I was surprised to see that there were around ten people standing behind the door. They were very

respectful. Once we sat, they started to give us snacks and drinks. They treated us as if we were their bosses.

The next morning I was surprised that my friend still didn't go to work. She said that her company manager was coming to visit. So, we waited and a fat woman, who was supposedly the manager, soon arrived. We talked about finances, management, and so on. She told me that their company sold cosmetics. I felt it was strange at first, but then didn't think much about it.

Later, my friend told me that under the company's system, there were five levels: E, D, C, B, and A. The most advanced level was A and E was the lowest. After selling one product (i.e., got one person to join the company) in this direct sales organization, you became an E-class salesman. Once you sold nine products, you became a D-class salesman. Recruiting ten to sixty-four people made you a C-class director. Sixty-five to 392 recruits made you a B-level executive. After 393, you became an A-class president. She told me that I would earn a lot by recruiting more people. I then realized I was involved in a pyramid scheme.

I had heard that pyramid schemes were everywhere, but I still couldn't believe that my friend had cheated me. I pretended that I knew nothing about their trick, because I was afraid they would treat me badly. In the following days, they kept talking about how their company was different from others and how you could become a billionaire through hard work. I knew that it was time to leave, so I told the manager that I could get some money from my brother. At first, she looked confused and suspicious. However, I persuaded her to let me go get the money. Finally I escaped, and I will never return.

**Account Four (male, b. 1986, Lha sa City, Tibet Autonomous Region).**

I'm a hotel manager. I was involved in a pyramid scheme in 2008. One of my best friends deceived me. He told me that he was in Guangxi and was working for a company. He said that I could earn a lot of money there. I didn't ask for details since I believed him. I left for Guangxi after a few days without telling my parents, since I was afraid that they wouldn't let me go. When I arrived in Guangxi, my friend sent me a message, saying that he needed to attend a meeting in Beijing, which meant he couldn't

meet me. He said a woman named Zhang Liang would pick me up. I waited for a few minutes and then a woman phoned me. She had gotten my phone number from my friend. She took me to where he worked and said that she and my friend were very close.

We reached our destination after about an hour and entered a small yard with a small flat. I saw many young people there. They all were very respectful. At that time, a woman around thirty years old came to me and introduced herself by saying that she was our boss. She pointed at a room and told me that I could rest there. I didn't talk to them much, but instead had a nap. After a few hours, I heard someone calling me to eat dinner. I saw that all the people were sitting around a big table, waiting for their boss. Once the boss arrived they shouted together, "Good evening boss! Enjoy your meal!" I felt uncomfortable with such abnormal behavior. After the meal, some of them cleaned the table and some washed the dishes. Then they started to play cards. They seemed happy and free.

They stopped their game at around ten p.m. that night and said that it was time to sleep. They asked me many questions that night about how many friends I had and if I knew how to make money. They told me I needed to change my outlook and accept new things to become successful.

I was awakened by loud music early the next morning. Everyone got up and began washing. After breakfast, they said we needed to attend a lecture, and then they took me to a small room with around sixty people. Once I saw the room and all the people in it, I realized that I was in danger; I was involved in a pyramid scheme. I saw a man standing on the stage. He was wearing a black suit and looked very formal. Everybody clapped when he began talking. He talked about finances for almost an hour. We then returned to our room. On the way, they asked me about the speech, and if I thought it was reasonable. I didn't answer. I had to stay there for six months. I was bored by the stupid speeches and bored by the daily routine.

One day, everyone went to attend the speech as usual. I made an excuse to leave, saying that I needed to go to the toilet. They didn't follow me, and then I jumped from the small toilet window to escape. I felt really lucky to escape, but I also felt sorry for those who remained there. I couldn't sleep for many nights afterwards and even had nightmares. I will never trust that friend again.

Account Five (male, b. 1967, Xiahe County, Gansu Province).

I am a herder, but sometimes do small business. My life was very stable and simple until the day my best friend visited and told me about a very good company in Guangzhou where we could make a lot of money. He said that the conditions there were perfect and included benefits like food, accommodation, and so on. At first, I didn't want to go, but later when he elaborated on how much a person could earn in a year, I was convinced and decided to go. I told my family about it and they supported me. I left my home the next day and went with my friend to Guangzhou.

We arrived in Guangzhou after a long trip and my friend took me immediately to the company. I was surprised to learn that the company was not what my friend had described. This so-called company appeared to be nothing more than an apartment that people rented and lived in. Trusting my friend, I asked nothing about it. He led me to a very small room where many people were sitting. Most were Chinese, but there were some Tibetans too. My friend told me to give him my membership fee. He had explained to me earlier that the more money I gave in the beginning, the more profit I would see over time. So, I gave him 70,000 RMB, expecting to eventually get a big return.

Over time, I was surprised to learn that I didn't need to do anything for this bizarre company except sit in an apartment with other people. During the day, people played cards and chatted with each other. There were also people who cooked. During the first few days, the food was good and tasty but, over time, it became worse. I asked my friend many questions about the company, but he never gave me a satisfactory response. He told me that if I got thirty people to join this strange company within one year, then I would receive 600,000 RMB. At that time, I thought of calling my two younger brothers to come, but then decided that was a bad idea. After about ten days, I realized that the company was cheating us and that the people who lived there were breaking the law. I told my friend that I wanted to leave, but he said that if I left, then they would hurt my family. I was scared and worried, and I felt I had no choice but to stay.

I was very concerned and knew that I had made a big mistake. I really wanted to leave, so I told my friend that I was going to find people to join. Then he gave me around 500 RMB to buy tickets and food. I promptly returned home and didn't tell the company anything about where I had gone. I really wanted to

deceive the company, but somehow I felt that I couldn't. Later, I returned to Guangzhou, because I was afraid that they would hurt my family.

I asked my friend how to escape from what I felt was a trap. He told me to give the company 7,000 RMB first and then he would try to help me escape. I don't know what he did, but he finally arranged for me to escape. Altogether, I stayed there for only four months, but it ended up being the most stressful and expensive four months of my life.

Account Six (male, b. 1986, Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Qinghai Province).

I am a twenty-six-year-old graduate student from Xunhua. After graduating I couldn't find a job, so I did some business with my father. One day, my best friend came to see me. His expensive clothes gave the impression that he was enjoying his life more than I was enjoying mine. We went to a bar that night and talked about our lives. He said he was doing some small business in Chengdu, working in a good store located in a very good shopping center. He said he couldn't handle it alone and asked me if I was interested in helping. I thought it was a great idea to work together.

My father is an experienced businessman and I asked him about my friend's idea. He told me to go to Chengdu to have a look and, if it looked good, then he would support my decision to go there. Then, I went to Chengdu with my friend. My friend showed me the store when we arrived. It looked like a great opportunity, since it was located in the city center. If we could manage it well then there was no doubt that we could earn money. I told my father about it and he sent me 20,000 RMB, which I then gave my friend.

Later, my friend took me to a small flat where many people lived together and told me that we had to stay there for a few days. I was shocked that I would have to stay with strangers. There were many people there, both Tibetans and Chinese.

My friend came to me the next morning and told me that we needed more money for the store. I talked to my father about it and he sent another 20,000 RMB, which I gave to my friend. I asked him to take me to the store so I could help, but he said he could handle it on his own. After a few weeks, I insisted on going

to the store. When he took me there, I was surprised and furious to find someone else working there.

Later, when we returned to the flat, he told me that he had lied to me. I was shocked and very upset, but it was too late. He told me that if I could recruit a few other people, then I would get my money back. I felt helpless and couldn't believe that my best friend had deceived me. Later, I lied and told him that if he let me go, I would return with new recruits. After leaving, I called my uncle and asked him to send me money. That night, I wandered around the city till dawn. The next morning, my uncle's money arrived and I bought a train ticket. Fortunately, I was able to escape from that terrible place and I returned home without a single *yuan*.

Account Seven (male, b. 1985, Jianzha County, Qinghai Province).

I am a twenty-seven-year-old man from Jianzha County, Qinghai Province. I worked as a laborer in Xining and I always felt like I was not earning enough, but I had no other options. One day I met a Chinese man who told me that I could get paid very well if I went with him to Hunan Province. He said that I could invest in a small company where people sold health care products.

At first, I didn't believe him, but after he showed me all the products and pictures of the company offices, I believed him. We left Xining the next day. When we reached Hunan, he took me to a single story house where many people lived together. He told me that they were all working for the same company.

As the day passed, I realized that this was the place where I was to live while I worked. One morning, a man woke me and told me to join my first training class. I followed him to a small room where many people were sitting and facing a blackboard. There was a fat man on the stage talking about how great their company was and how much one person could earn after just one month. He was very effective at motivating us to work for the company.

After the training, we had lunch in the same room where we had class. Considering the lecture we had just heard, I thought that it was strange that our lunch was not enough to feed us all. Days passed and I earned nothing. I stayed there without doing anything meaningful. I felt bored and helpless. I was told that if I convinced people to join the company, I would

be promoted to a higher position where I could get more money. Since I had yet to actually receive any money, I decided to do it and returned home.

When I got home, my family members asked me about the situation in Hunan. I told them that everything was fine. At that time, my younger sister had failed an important exam and had quit school. I decided to take her back to Hunan with me. We both stayed in Hunan for a long time. We thought that if we stayed longer, we would eventually get money, but instead we continued to get nothing.

Company members never let us use phones and followed us wherever we went, making it impossible to escape. During the Tibetan New Year, they let one of us go home because they were afraid that if both of us left, we would not return.

I returned home, borrowed money from villagers, and went back to Hunan. I gave the company 5,000 RMB in exchange for them allowing us to leave. When we returned home, the villagers who had lent me money constantly asked for repayment. Neither my sister nor I had a job, and could not return the money quickly. We eventually sold all of our family's livestock and much of our property in order to repay the money.

### NOTABLE FEATURES OF PYRAMID SCHEMES ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

There are important similarities to be drawn from these first-hand accounts that characterize certain unique features of pyramid schemes on the Tibetan Plateau. The following analysis examines these similarities in terms of recruitment process, recruitment hierarchy, and confinement.

Pyramid schemes require an investment, thus the act of recruitment emphasizes building trust. As a result, recruitment commonly begins with those one already trusts. In all the accounts, people were deceived by close friends or romantic partners. As noted previously, the most popular choice for finding a job in the surveys was through close friends and relatives. Furthermore, in the second account, new members were forced to call friends and relatives they thought could be potentially recruited. In Account Two, higher status members and newcomers discussed personality types and current jobs of potential recruits.



After initial contact, interested people are encouraged to travel to a distant location to learn more, where they become the center of attention upon arrival. Newcomers are initially treated with respect and kindness. However, if discussions go poorly and the person shows a strong desire to leave, kindness and respect quickly become hostility and aggression, as in the case of Account Two. Great respect is shown to leaders, who typically pay extra attention to newcomers, as in Account Three. As a result, the newcomer is made to feel special and strongly wanted by the organization.

Ambition, greed, and fear all figure prominently in pyramid schemes. Higher-level workers and leaders who originally create the model are driven by greed. If they elude authorities, they make large profits. Those who are not primarily motivated by greed might be motivated by ambition. Leaders who are aware of this ambition will structure the organizational hierarchy such that a person's level of importance is directly related to the number of new members they find. In Account Three, the woman says one can become an executive or president by recruiting a certain number of people. Since there are no additional responsibilities involved, and since the only criteria for advancement is success with recruitment, it is clear that this model plays on the ambition of new members to feel important within the organization.

Recruits are driven by a fear of losing a large investment or of their family members being harmed. The latter seems to be common to this region, but less prevalent in the US. In the accounts, individuals were rarely personally threatened – the focus was on family members. Such fear is motivating, because it is not directly present. Participants are uncertain that pyramid scheme workers will carry out these threats, which is sufficiently frightening to motivate them. As a result, newcomers may feel that failure to do what they are told will result in harm to their family members.

In most accounts, newcomers are strictly forbidden from leaving the small, cramped working area. Recruits do little or no work in this new environment. Residents play cards and have such responsibilities as preparing food and washing dishes. When newcomers are not doing chores, they may be required to attend lectures by charismatic leaders who hold out the prospect of making

huge profits within the company by finding new recruits. Newcomers are usually forbidden to leave these lectures or their living spaces.

After some time, however, the desire to be free from confinement grows and many newcomers begin strategizing on how to leave. As can be seen in the previous accounts, it is common to give money in order to escape. In previous accounts, people pretended to find new recruits, but had to officially join the company in order to make their attempt to find new recruits seem legitimate. The act of joining often involves paying a sum of money. In other cases, people found a moment of solitude and fled. The accounts show that what begins as economic deception often becomes an actively hostile environment in which a person is held against their will. Although these schemes take place in what are supposedly corporate environments, new recruits' attempts to escape are similar to the act of paying a ransom to escape kidnappers.

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES FOR PYRAMID SCHEME PREVENTION

Rapid socioeconomic change in China has created circumstances for pyramid schemes to flourish on the Tibetan Plateau. The drive to find employment outside the home is a predictable result of the move towards a market economy and the proletarianization of the population. The best way to mitigate the development of pyramid schemes is to provide multiple mechanisms for awareness among young job seekers. In this respect, we suggest that literature about pyramid schemes needs to be written in languages besides Chinese. As noted previously, there is a stark difference between the extent to which Tibetans and Han Chinese learn about pyramid schemes through reading, because more literature exists in Chinese which is more widely distributed than Tibetan literature. Mitigation of the effects of pyramid scheme development on the Tibetan Plateau might be attempted by distributing materials raising awareness among minority populations.

Educational institutions might also better prepare young people for the job market. The generational gap with regard to seeking outside employment makes it harder for younger generations

to receive sound advice from parents and elders on finding legitimate employment opportunities. Schools could fill this gap by providing information on pyramid schemes and avoidance strategies. Based on our research, the least common method of learning about pyramid schemes is from educational institutions. This could easily change by mandating education about pyramid schemes.

The government might reduce disparity between Tibetan and non-Tibetan job competitiveness by subsidizing contractors that hire Tibetans. Minimizing the intensity of competitiveness will increase the chances of Tibetans finding suitable jobs. Furthermore, the government should offer vocational training programs in villages to help poor farming families or recently sedentarized herders. If vocational training programs are widely implemented, it will be increasingly possible for individuals seeking employment outside the subsistence sector to find legitimate jobs. This benefits the government by making herders less dependent on government subsidies.<sup>19</sup>

These above suggestions, if implemented, would reduce the desire for involvement in pyramid schemes by both raising awareness and reducing overall job desperation. The government clearly wants to shape the Tibetan Plateau into an economy based less on subsistence and more on market forces. Accomplishing this goal will require the government to make policies that not only improve employment opportunities but also prevent economic traps like pyramid schemes.

#### PERSONALLY AVOIDING PYRAMID SCHEMES

Cautionary tales often lead readers to think, "That would never happen to me." Most people in the accounts presented above probably felt the same way. Within the pyramid scheme trap, people may succumb to pressures and do things they will later regret, such as exploiting relationships with family and friends. The best way to

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on the effects vocational training might have for recently displaced nomads see (Ptackova 2012).

avoid such situations is by knowing what signs to look for when job-seeking.

First, all pyramid schemes require investments, because pyramid schemes make money by taking money from new recruits. This 'investment' may be called a participation fee, an advance, or a membership fee. Working for a company should involve receiving, not giving money. Finding an appropriate investment opportunity can be quite complicated, and should require a significant amount of research to ensure that there will be a return. A contract or legally binding agreement should be made that protects the investor, whether the investment occurs as the basis of a business partnership, a startup cost, or an investment in the stock market. Furthermore, no investment should be required in order to become an employee of a legitimate company.

Second, pyramid schemes usually require little actual work. Most members are passive recipients of information that is meant to convince them that the company actually does something. As a general rule, making money requires production. If that 'production' is finding new employees who then find more new employees, then no marketable goods are being produced.

Third, all companies have a product of some sort. Caution should be exercised if a company is vague about what is being sold. Furthermore, an employee's role should fit into the production or distribution of the product. There is probably no real product if the new role is unrelated to product production or distribution, or if the product is not the main source of the business's income. In cases where a person is told to sell a product or find other employees to sell the product, it is important to learn how marketable the product is. In some cases, pyramid schemers will have an actual product, but the product is unsellable, which means the investor has lost their investment by buying the product, or are in a situation where they must convince others to join the company to help sell products that cannot be sold.

Fourth, pyramid schemers try to persuade victims that joining their company is an easy way to make money. Most legitimate companies do not like to emphasize how easy their new job will be. In fact, companies often tell new employees that the job will be

challenging, but that hard work leads to success. Making money almost always requires creative thinking and hard work. Companies that try to convince new members otherwise are likely scams.

Finally, legitimate companies have clear guidelines and rules that create clear boundaries. Most companies have rules because they serve a clear purpose within their business model. If a company creates rules that only confine employees, it is clear that the company is engaged in illegal activity. Most companies only want willing employees who are free to leave if they are no longer interested in working.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, most companies have a specific department for hiring employees and do not ask employees to do the hiring. A company that has rules requiring new employees to find a certain number of people to join, or rules restricting new employees from leaving the company, is probably a pyramid scheme.

## CONCLUSION

Life on the Tibetan Plateau is rapidly changing. Subsistence farming and herding are becoming less viable options and increasing numbers of young Tibetans are forced to look for work in the market economy. Tibetan job seekers typically start by approaching friends and relatives, and are usually comfortable with making an initial investment. Pyramid schemes have been successful among Tibetans because there is a lack of awareness of such schemes and a dearth of quality vocational training, as the demand for new sources of income increases. By making such fundamental institutional changes as creating vocational programs, producing literature on pyramid schemes in languages other than Chinese, mainstreaming lessons on pyramid schemes in educational institutions, and subsidizing contractors who hire local Tibetans, the overall prevalence of pyramid schemes and the number of victims can be drastically reduced across the Tibetan Plateau.

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<sup>20</sup> Though certain legal companies, especially in the manufacturing sector, do threaten to not pay employees who attempt to breach their contracts by leaving early.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Anhui 安徽

Bai 白

China Anti-Pyramid Selling Association, zhōngguó fǎnchuánxiāo  
xiéhuì 中国反传销协会

Deqing 德钦

Gansu 甘肃

Guangxi 广西

Guangzhou 广州

Hui 回

Hunan 湖南

Jianzha 尖扎

Lha sa ལ་ས་

Lisu 傣傣

Miao 苗

Qinghai 青海

Rgyal yum sgrol ma རྒྱལ་ཡུམ་སྐྱོལ་མ།

Tongren 同仁

Tu 土

Xiahe 夏河

Xining 西宁

Xunhua 循化

*yuan* 元

Yunnan 云南



# TIBETANS AND MUSLIMS IN NORTHWEST CHINA: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF A COMPLEX HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP

Bianca Horlemann (Research Associate, Humboldt University Berlin)

## ABSTRACT

In the past and today, Tibetan-Muslim relations in Qinghai and Gansu are often associated with violent conflicts sparked by religious differences or 'interethnic hatred'. A more nuanced study of the history of Tibetan-Muslim relations, however, reveals complexity as well as considerable local difference with regard to how and when contacts were established, maintained, and broken off. Tibetan-Muslim encounters were manifold and varied, including interethnic marriages, close business relations, political alliances, and armed conflicts. To illustrate this wide range of encounters, examples chosen for this paper, i.e., the relations between Amdo Tibetans and the Muslim Baoan nationality, the Muslim Ma warlords, and the Chinese *xiejia* institution, span different eras and localities. This study suggests that Tibetan-Muslim relations were predominantly shaped by socio-economic and political factors rather than by religious differences or 'interethnic hatred' as is often assumed.

## KEYWORDS

Baoan, Golok/ Mgo log, Ma warlords, Muslim, Qinghai, Tibetan, *xiejia*

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

I introduce the complex situation of Tibetan-Muslim relations in northwest China by providing a broad analysis of the three examples chosen for this paper. I wish to point out at the beginning that I frequently use and contrast the terms 'Muslims' and 'Tibetans', although the first term denotes ethnically and culturally diverse groups who adhere to Islam while 'Tibetans' refers to a culturally and ethnically defined group. I have often opted for 'Muslims' as a very general, collective term for different ethnicities in order to avoid repetitive enumerations of ethnic names that are not commonly known and not automatically associated with Islam in northwest China. Furthermore, I have restricted this study to Tibetans and do not deal with 'Buddhists' (although the great majority of Tibetans believe in Buddhism) as opposed to 'Muslims', since I specifically argue in this paper that religious aspects play only a minor role in Muslim-Tibetan relations. Nor do I treat in detail other Buddhist adherents in northwest China such as the Mongols, Yugurs, and Chinese with the exception of the Monguor in relation to the Baoan.<sup>2</sup>

The last few years have seen frequent reports of violent conflicts between Tibetans and Muslims. Social turbulence in March 2008 in Tibetan<sup>3</sup> areas of China included attacks on mosques, Muslim shops, and restaurants (*Los Angeles Times* 23 June 2008), thus reminding observers of the centuries-old presence of Muslims in overwhelmingly Buddhist Tibet. Such conflicts led to Tibetan boycott movements against Muslim shops and restaurants, expulsion of Muslim families from Tibetan villages, and caused casualties on both sides. At times, seemingly trivial incidents ignited violent reactions,

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<sup>1</sup> This revised version of a German language article (Horlemann 2009) reflects initial results of ongoing research generously supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. I thank the AHP editors, Marie-Paule Hille, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments. Remaining mistakes are entirely my own.

<sup>2</sup> Chinese is transcribed in *pinyin* and Tibetan in Wylie. Exceptions are made for terms commonly known in westernized forms, e.g., lama for *bla ma* and such Tibetan personal names as Jamyang Shaypa ('Jam dbyangs bzhad pa).

<sup>3</sup> 'Tibet' and 'Tibetan' as used here mainly refer to cultural Tibet in modern China, i.e., to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and culturally Tibetan areas of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces in China.

e.g., the quarrel between young Tibetans and Muslims over a game of billiards, the allegedly overpriced sale of a balloon to a Tibetan child by a Muslim vendor, or rumors about Muslim restaurant owners mixing ashes of deceased Muslims into food in order to convert Tibetan customers to Islam (*Los Angeles Times* 23 June 2008; *World Tibet News* 25 February 2008, Fischer 2008a:168, 171-181, and 2005:16-22).

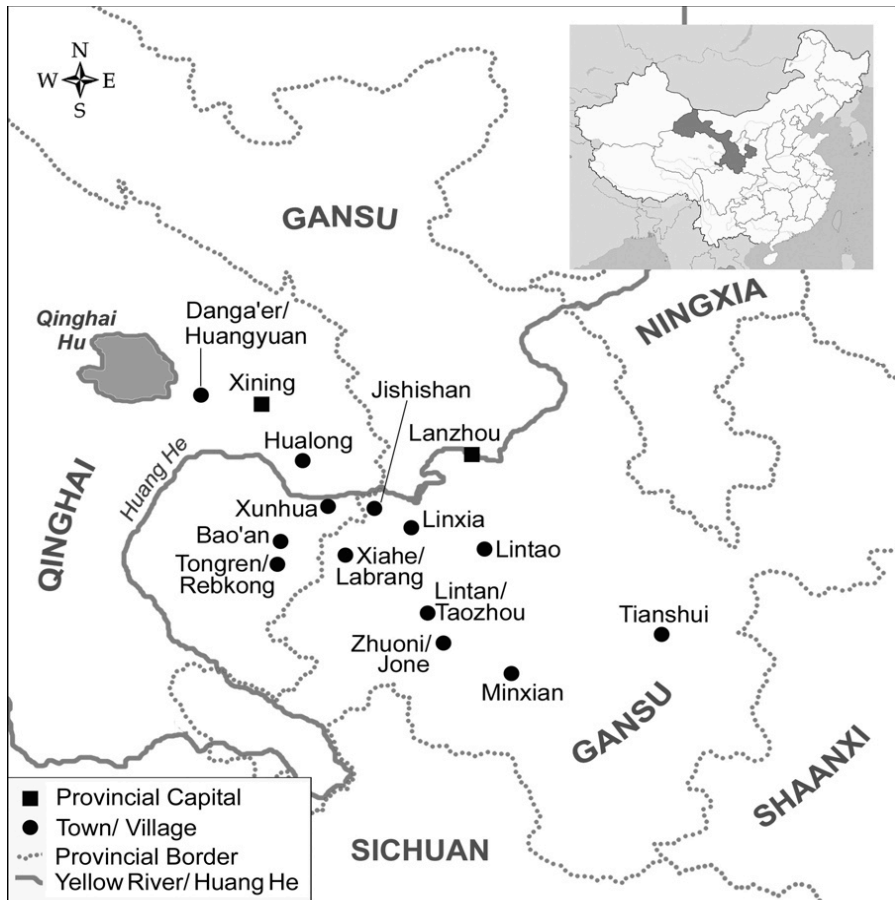


Figure 1. Gansu and Eastern Qinghai. Map draft: B Horlemann, map maker: A Gruschke.

While central Tibet is home to few Muslims and non-Tibetans, the population of southern Gansu and eastern Qinghai is ethnically complex. According to Chinese official data based on the 2000 census,

non-Tibetans living in the TAR account for less than ten percent of the population (Fischer 2008b:631-662). Although Han Chinese constitute the ethnic majority in Gansu Province (approximately ninety-one percent of the population), the local ethnic fabric is quite different. In Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, for example, 780,000 Han Chinese live with 1.05 million people of other ethnicities, most of whom are Muslims. In neighboring Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture there are about 270,000 Han Chinese compared to about 370,000 members of other ethnicities, mostly Tibetans (*Gansu nianjian 2001* 2001:31, 187, 260). In Qinghai Province the population is fifty-four percent Han Chinese, twenty-two percent Tibetan, and sixteen percent Hui. However, if one takes, for example, the ethnic minority of the Muslim Salar who only account for about two percent of the overall population of Qinghai, in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, southeast of the provincial capital Xining, the roughly 71,000 Salar constitute a clear ethnic majority compared to only 7,000 Han Chinese, 26,000 Tibetans and 8,000 Hui living in the same county (*Qinghai tongji nianjian 2001* 2001:6-7, 43).

It is also important to provide some background on the ethnic groups that are central to this paper. The ten million Hui in China are purported to be descendants of Arabian and Persian merchants who came to Chinese seaports to trade from the seventh century onwards and eventually founded new families with Chinese wives. Due to the considerable admixture with Han Chinese, these Muslim merchants assimilated linguistically and culturally to their new homeland with the exception of their religious beliefs. Consequently, commitment to Islam has remained the main marker of the Hui minority while culturally and linguistically they are as diverse as the local Chinese communities in which they live (Gladney 1996:26-36).

The Salar are a Turkic-speaking Muslim minority presently numbering about 100,000 people. They live mostly in the Qinghai-Gansu border region on both sides of the Yellow River, primarily in Xunhua County and Hualong Hui Autonomous County of Qinghai, and the adjacent Jishishan Baoan, Dongxiang, and Salar Autonomous County of Gansu.

The Monguor (Tu)<sup>4</sup> include the Monguor of Tongren County, Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, and Minhe Hui and Tu Autonomous County all in Qinghai and Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County in Gansu. They speak mutually unintelligible Monguor dialects/ languages, dress differently, and have acculturated differently according to the dominant ethnic groups in their home areas. A common denominator is adherence to Tibetan Buddhism, while other speakers of Mongolic languages who are Muslims, such as the Dongxiang and the Baoan, are classified under specific ethnonyms.<sup>5</sup>

Baoan designates a Mongolic dialect as well as a people. They are also known as Bonan, Baonan, Paoan, and Paongan (Fried 2010:2). The Dongxiang, sometimes called Sarts, are a Mongol-speaking Muslim minority presently numbering about 250,000. They live in remote areas east of Hezhou/ Linxia, in Jishishan County and in Dongxiang Autonomous County.



FIGURE 2. Girls from Gansu/ Qinghai in the 1930s. Photo Archive, Anthropos Institute, St. Augustin.

<sup>4</sup> Also Mangghuer and Mongghul.

<sup>5</sup> For an illuminating study on the self-perception of the Tongren Monguor who often refer to themselves as 'Tibetans', and on the Tongren Baoan dialect/ language see Fried (2009, 2010).

In addition to these groups, there is also a steadily increasing number of Han Chinese. I also wish to stress that during their long history as close neighbors, tensions among these various ethnicities existed in almost all possible constellations; they were not restricted exclusively to the relationship between Tibetans and Muslims.

With regard to Gansu and Qinghai, there are many examples of intra-ethnic conflicts, such as Tibetan inter-tribal conflicts, as well as intra-religious conflicts, e.g., conflicts between different Tibetan monasteries or between Muslim sects. Especially the conflicts between different Muslim sects often turned into interethnic conflicts, i.e., usually into Han-Hui conflicts. In fact, owing to the great diversity of Muslim schools of thought across the various ethnic groups mentioned above, the Muslim population of Gansu and Qinghai is much more heterogeneous than usually anticipated, though they all adhere to Sunni Islam. Apart from the widespread Gedimu tradition, many Qinghai and Gansu Muslims follow one of the main Sufi orders, i.e., the Naqshbandiyya (subdivided into Khufiyya and Jahriyya), the Qadariyya, and the Kubrawiyya, which became popular in China beginning in the seventeenth century. In contrast to the Gedimu tradition, many Sufi orders have established strong socio-economic and politico-religious structures based on the deep veneration of their religious leaders, the *shaykhs*, as well as the possibility of passing on the *shaykh* position from father to son or to a close disciple, and on the often substantial mobile and immobile donations of followers to their respective *shaykh*. This has led to the accumulation of great riches by several Sufi orders. Sects based on a specific line of Sufi tradition connected with a certain *shaykh* are called *menhuan* in Chinese and are independent of each other.

*Menhuan* may also compete with each other regarding questions of correct religious practices and economic and politico-religious influence within the Muslim communities (Gladney 1996:36-59, Aubin 1989:212, 363, and Dillon 1999:95-100, 113-114). During the eighteenth century, these rivalries led to a division of the Sufi Naqshbandiyya communities into adherents of the so-called New School (*xinjiao*/ Jahriyya) represented by Ma Mingxin's (1719-1781) teachings and the Old School (*laojiao*/ Khufiyya) represented by Ma Laichi's (1673-1753) teachings. The nineteenth century witnessed a

further splintering into a New New School (*xinxinjiao*/ Yihewani) led by Ma Wanfu/ Ma Guoyuan (1849-1934) (Dillon 1999:100-103 and Gladney 1996:55-56). Theological differences within Islam in northwest China not only repeatedly sparked violent conflicts within the Muslim communities, but also often affected Muslim relations with Chinese local authorities after one Muslim party had appealed to Chinese judicial institutions to intervene.<sup>6</sup> Tibetans, however, usually only became involved when Chinese authorities mustered Tibetan military support in order to subdue Muslim unrest after unsuccessful Chinese intervention.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from these intra-religious Islamic disputes that often grew into interethnic, mostly Han-Hui, conflicts, numerous direct Tibetan-Muslim confrontations occurred as well. In China, the causes of interethnic conflicts were frequently attributed to divergent religious beliefs and 'interethnic hatred' (*minzu chouhen*) or 'interethnic contradictions' (*minzu maodun*). This viewpoint is often shared by Tibetans and Muslims alike, and is probably also the predominant opinion among Westerners today and in the past. In post-1950 China and in accordance with the communist perspective, the former feudal system was usually singled out as the main cause of dissent between ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup>

However, the social economist Fischer, who has studied Tibetan-Muslim conflicts after the introduction of the Open Door Policy in China in the 1980s, argues that the frequently recurrent conflicts of the last two decades were mainly caused by a continuously progressing socio-economic marginalization of Tibetans (Fischer 2008a:159-192, 2008b:631-662, 2005:1-27, and 2004:1-35). Modern Chinese scholars such as Min (2006:542) and Ma (2006:316-

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<sup>6</sup> Lipman, who studies the history of Muslim-Han relations, suggests that the strife for dominance of different Sufi orders was the main instigator of interethnic conflict in eighteenth-nineteenth century northwest China (see Lipman 1990:65-86, 1980, and 1984:285-316).

<sup>7</sup> For an example, see the Baoan section further below.

<sup>8</sup> See *Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* (1999:1349-1350), *Jishishan baoanzu dongxiangzu salazu zizhixian gaikuang* (1986:31), *Baoanzu jianshi* (1984:25), *Linxia huizu zizhizhou gaikuang* (1986:72), Ma (1999:14-15), Hartmann (1921:X-XIII), Ekvall (1939:23, 28), Atwill (2005:36-37), and Anonymous (1919b:843). Gillette (2008:1025, 1034) analyses 'interethnic hatred' with regard to the Han-Hui relationship.

23) also stress the importance of economic issues for forming Muslim-Tibetan relations in the context of their studies in modern Gannan Prefecture and Xunhua County, respectively.

My preliminary studies on the history of Tibetan-Muslim interactions in Gansu and Qinghai between 1862 and 1949 also mainly point towards socio-economic and political causes for interethnic conflicts and indicate that divergent religious beliefs or ethno-cultural differences primarily reinforced already existing political and economic Muslim-Tibetan conflicts. Though religious issues certainly played a major role in specific conflicts, this did not occur as often as commonly assumed. I therefore argue that future research should focus more on competing political and economic interests such as Muslim-Tibetan disputes over land, water, and pasture rights as potential causes for interethnic conflicts.<sup>9</sup>



FIGURE 3. Scene in Reb gong/ Tongren County, 1998. Photo B Horlemann.

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<sup>9</sup> Water rights issues continue to be of importance for modern Xunhua County (see Ma 2006:321).



The lack of academic exploration of land disputes in Tibetan-Muslim relations can perhaps be explained in part by the strength of certain ethnic stereotypes. The common stereotype of Muslims as extremely successful and cunning merchants and service providers suggests that Muslim economic activities mainly focus on commerce and the service sector whereas, in fact, the majority of Muslims depend on farming and animal husbandry and mostly engage in commerce as a side business. In the late 1980s, for example, sixty percent of the Hui in China worked in the agricultural sector while ninety percent of Baoan, Dongxiang, and Salar earned their living as farmers (Gladney 1996:30-32). A very similar picture for the 1930s is found in Ekvall (1939:14-17) and Zhang (*Minguo* era, 110).

At the same time, we should keep in mind that for extended periods of time Tibetans and Muslims in Gansu and Qinghai lived peacefully side-by-side and often entertained close social and economic contacts. Furthermore, both groups influenced each other culturally, linguistically and religiously, whereby the Muslims apparently borrowed more from the Tibetans than vice versa.<sup>10</sup>

For this paper I have chosen to focus on interactions of Amdo Tibetans with the Muslim Baoan, the Muslim Ma warlords, and the *xiejia* institution because they not only provide a cross-section through different eras and localities, but represent distinct examples that have been little studied in western literature.

#### THE BAOAN MUSLIMS AND THEIR FORMER TIBETAN NEIGHBORS

A historical example illustrative of the many different layers of Muslim-Tibetan relations is the migration of the small (16,000) Muslim Baoan minority. The ethnogenesis of this minority is complicated and much debated. For reasons stated below, the Baoan

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, references to the formerly not unusual mixed marriages between Muslim men and Tibetan women in d'Ollone (1911:234-235), Cwik (1952:242-244), Griebenow (1936:128), Ekvall (1939:62), and Ma (2006:287-288). The latter also describes how certain Tibetan wedding customs are still practised in Salar marriages up to the present (Ma 2006). With regard to religious borrowings see, for example, d'Ollone (1911), Slobodnik (2008), Andrew (1921:65, 108), and Hayward (1934:76-77).

of Jishishan County in Gansu are a splinter group of a people living in the Reb gong (Tongren) area of Qinghai. The Tongren Baoan who are officially classified as Monguor (Tu), and are thus also referred to as Tongren Tu, are Buddhists and considerably Tibetanized, often speaking Tibetan as their first or second language. In contrast, the Baoan living in Jishishan are Muslims and speak Chinese as their second language. Though the Baoan dialects spoken by these two groups differ, they are still mutually intelligible, whereas certain other Mongolic Tu languages in Qinghai and Gansu are not (Fried 2010:2-3, 6-11; Gao 1987:349; and Lian 2006:368).

According to one theory, the Baoan, who have neither ethnonym for themselves nor glottonym for their language, are the descendants of the Tuyuhun, who migrated from Manchuria to the Qinghai area as early as the third century AD.<sup>11</sup> A more widely accepted theory considers the Baoan to be descendants of Muslim Mongols or Central Asian Turks who in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries followed the Mongol army during their military campaigns to northwest China and were later settled as military colonists close to the Baoan fortification near modern Reb gong/ Tongren. Having lived in the Baoan area for many centuries, this place name eventually became the ethnonym of the speakers of that specific Mongolic dialect. Supposedly, the Baoan mixed with the local population who were mainly Tibetans, but also included Hui and Han residents as well as other Monguor groups.<sup>12</sup> Despite the strong Tibetan cultural influences most Baoan retained their own language and Muslim belief. The majority of the Baoan lived as farmers and/or herders, apparently often on land leased from Tibetan monasteries or from other major landlords such as the local *tusi*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Fried (2010:7) and *Baoanzu jianshi* (1984:14 fn. 7).

<sup>12</sup> See Yang (1988:534), Ma (2001:5-6), Lian (2006:365-366), Mian (2006:127-128), and Feng (2007:174). The Baoan language contains a large amount of Old Mongolian vocabulary as well as Chinese, Salar, Yugur, and Tibetan lexical items (Hua 1992 and Ma 2001:32-33). Tibetan cultural influences are also reflected in Baoan wedding customs and traditional costumes, as well as in the widespread northwest China folk songs called *hua'er* that are also popular with the Baoan (Ma 1990:51-56).

<sup>13</sup> For general accounts of Baoan history, see Lian (2006:365-367), Shi and Zhang (2003:62-65), Ma (2001:2-8, 214-222), *Gansu shaoshu minzu* (1989:221-231), *Jishishan baoanzu dongxiangzu salazu zizhixian gaikuang*

Since the Baoan lack a script of their own and Chinese sources provide only fragmentary accounts, we mainly rely on oral traditions with regard to their history.<sup>14</sup> Most sources agree that out-migration from the Baoan area in Reb gong began in the mid-nineteenth century due to serious disputes with the local Tibetans and the Buddhist Monguor/ Tongren Tu. However, accounts differ with regard to the causes for the conflicts.

Some versions claim that the violence started after Tibetan youth of the Duosaidong Tribe<sup>15</sup> tricked Muslim Baoan into eating pork, deliberately disregarding the Muslim taboo on pork consumption. Other versions blame disputes about irrigation rights for causing the conflicts.<sup>16</sup> One account specifically relates how the Baoan were originally of Tibetan ethnicity and firm believers in Buddhism. However, after they had converted to Islam, they were socially and economically marginalized by the Buddhist clergy of Rong bo Monastery in Reb gong as well as by certain local tribal chieftains.<sup>17</sup> Especially during the Xianfeng era (1851-1862), Rong bo Monastery is supposed to have used irrigation rights as a means to pressure the Baoan to (re)convert to Buddhism, allegedly even encouraging the killing of Baoan unwilling to convert.<sup>18</sup> After a series of attacks during the mid to late nineteenth century by the Tibetan Maba Tribe (of which the Duosaidong Tribe constituted a sub-tribe) as well as by allied Buddhist Monguor, the majority of the Muslim Baoan fled east, first towards Xunhua and later to Jishishan.

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(1986:29-35), and *Baoanzu jianshi* (1984). See Ma and Wang (2004) for a bibliographical essay on Chinese language publications on the Baoan.

<sup>14</sup> Many of the oral traditions have been included in internal Chinese reports created during the ethnic identification campaign of the 1950s (see Ding 1999:17-21 and Ma 2001:214-270 for extracts).

<sup>15</sup> I borrowed the terms 'tribe', 'sub-tribe', and 'clan' from my sources for convenience since the on-going academic discussion of these terms is not directly relevant to this paper.

<sup>16</sup> See *Baoanzu jianshi* (1984:24-25, 29), *Jishishan baoanzu dongxiangzu salazu zizhixian gaikuang* (1986:31), and Ma (2001:3).

<sup>17</sup> See Yang (1988:554-555 fn. 3(4)).

<sup>18</sup> See *Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* (1999:1350) and Yang (1988:555). No source is provided for the alleged appeal to kill those unwilling to convert to Buddhism.

Most Chinese studies attribute these outbursts of violence against the Muslim Baoan by Reb gong Tibetans and Monguor mainly to increased competition for scarce water resources needed for irrigation and further exacerbated by population pressure. In fact, land disputes between Tibetans and Muslim Baoan have remained a recurrent event in Reb gong County into the twenty-first century.<sup>19</sup> However, certain other events deserve further research. For example, in the early to mid-nineteenth century Muslim Salar from the Xunhua area were employed as troops by the Qing administration to quell the rising number of Tibetan-Mongol pasture conflicts when Tibetan tribes from south of the Rma chu/ Huanghe began pressing north into the Mongolian dominated grasslands towards Kokonor.<sup>20</sup> This military engagement of Muslim Salar from neighboring Xunhua was also directed against Tibetan tribes originating from the Reb gong area, which further negatively impacted Tibetan relations with their Muslim Baoan neighbors in the Reb gong area.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the flight of the Muslim Baoan roughly coincided with the various Muslim uprisings in Gansu and Qinghai between 1860 and 1873 and with general anti-Muslim unrest elsewhere in China.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Muslim Baoan also participated in revolts directed against the Qing administration, joining Salar and Hui from Xunhua and Hualong. In response, the Qing this time mustered support from Tibetans and Buddhist Monguor against the Muslim threat to Chinese authority (*Qing miaocong yi huangdi shilu*, juan 109, 2023 and *Tongren xianzhi*

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<sup>19</sup> See Snying bo rgyal and Rino (2008:153-154).

<sup>20</sup> Mtsho sngon po/ Qinghai hu. Tibetan attacks on the Kokonor Mongols started in the late eighteenth century and continued to recur until the late 1850s.

<sup>21</sup> See *Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* (1999:1354-1360) and *Qing xuanzong cheng huangdi shilu* (juan 211, 2530) for the involvement of Tibetan tribes from the Reb gong area and the employment of the Salar. From 1762 onwards, the area of modern Reb gong/ Tongren County was partially under the administration of Xunhua *ting*. Thus most Tibetan tribes from Reb gong County are designated 'Xunhua tribes' in Chinese sources.

<sup>22</sup> Ma (2001:3, 310). Note also the so-called Panthay Rebellion in Yunnan, 1856-1873, the Muslim uprisings in Shaanxi between 1862 and 1873, and the Ya'qub Beg rebellion and rule in Eastern Turkestan/ Xinjiang in the 1860s/ 1870s.

2001:24), thus further aggravating the already existing interethnic tensions mentioned above.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the Qing administration withdrew its regular troops stationed in the Baoan garrison from 1860 to 1871, in order to reinforce troops elsewhere (*Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* 1999:987), thereby providing a good opportunity for the Reb gong Tibetans and Monguors to rid themselves of their Muslim Baoan neighbors.

Surprisingly, many of the fleeing Muslim Baoan were protected and assisted by the Tibetan Gling rgyal/ Langjia Tribe, who were one of the twelve major tribes in the Reb gong area and neighbors of the attacking Maba tribe. Even today, the Baoan of Ganhetan and Meipo villages in Gansu call members of the Tibetan Gling rgyal tribe *awangcang* 'life saving benefactors' or *axiang* 'maternal uncles' (*Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* 1999:1351 and Yang 1988:554-556).<sup>24</sup> Well into the twentieth century, Baoan representatives annually brought presents to the Gling rgyal Tribe to thank them for their former protection and assistance. Studies on the relationship of the Baoan to the Gling rgyal Tribe prior to the expulsion of the Baoan from Reb gong are lacking. It would be of value to learn if support offered by the Gling rgyal Tribe had its origin in a special bond with the Baoan or if it was motivated by conflict with the Maba Tribe or Rong bo Monastery and thus followed the principle of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.<sup>25</sup> One source suggests that the Baoan Muslims had previously contributed generously to a newly built temple of the Gling rgyal Tribe, which fostered good relations between the Baoan and their Tibetan neighbors (Ma 2001:229).

Prior to expulsion from the Reb gong area, several Baoan had yielded to the pressure of the Buddhist clergy and converted to Buddhism.<sup>26</sup> Conversion from Islam to Buddhism and vice versa,

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<sup>23</sup> Chinese officials apparently promised to compensate Tibetan and Monguor support by transferring land of defeated Muslims (Bonin 1910:218).

<sup>24</sup> The Baoan were also supported by other Buddhist neighbors such as the Monguor Helongnaka Tribe (Yang 1998:21-23).

<sup>25</sup> For the numerous, recurrent Tibetan inter-tribal conflicts in the late nineteenth century Reb gong area see, for example, Yang 2009.

<sup>26</sup> See *Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* (1999:1350). Presently, only a few hundred Baoan are registered in Reb gong/ Tongren County; presumably

whether of individuals or even of whole villages, has repeatedly occurred in Qinghai and Gansu.<sup>27</sup> Although some conversions might have been caused by sincere changes in religious conviction, others were apparently due to pressure or opportunism. For example, according to tradition, twenty-eight former Buddhist Tibetan tribes in what is now Ba yan rong/ Hualong County in Qinghai, allegedly converted to Islam after miracles were performed by the famous eighteenth century Sufi master Ma Laichi.<sup>28</sup> In fact, several villages in Hualong County are still inhabited by so-called 'Tibetan Muslims' (Bod hu'i/ E hui) today.

#### THE MUSLIM MA WARLORDS IN QINGHAI

The negative image of Muslims in the collective memory of the Tibetans in Qinghai and Gansu today has been considerably shaped by the numerous violent conflicts, which accompanied the rise to power of the Muslim clan of Ma Haiyan (1837-1900?) in the early twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> The Ma family originated from a Hui village near

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many are registered as Tibetan, Monguor, or Hui (see *Tongren xian zhi* 2001:207 and Lian 2006:367). Fried (2010:6) mentions 4,000 Baoan speakers in Tongren County.

<sup>27</sup> Accounts of conversion are mostly found in Christian missionary reports. See, for example, Griebenow (1936:128) and Andrew (1921:52-53). For the more frequently occurring conversions of Han Chinese to Islam see Andrew (1921:64-65) and Ekvall (1939:25-28). For individual conversions, see for example, Ma Shou, a former Tibetan Buddhist monk who converted to Islam and became the Tibetan interpreter and trusted assistant of the Muslim warlord Ma Qi (*Huang zhengqing yu wu shi jiamuyang* 1989:9-10).

<sup>28</sup> On these so-called 'Tibetan Kargang (Kha sgang/ Kagang/ Kaligang) Muslims' see Rockhill (1894:82-83), Trippner (1961:154-155), Li and Xu (1982:417-426), and Chang (forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> This account is based on Chinese and Tibetan secondary literature on the Ma Warlord era as well as on rarely used western and Chinese sources such as contemporary newspapers and reports by missionaries and western travellers. For the numerous secondary sources see, for example, Chen (2007), Yang (2007), Shi (2006), *Qinghai san ma* (1988), Hunsberger (1978; Chinese translation 1994), *Qinghai lishi jiyao* (1987), Don grub dbang rgyal (1991), 'Gu log dam chos dpal bzang (2000), Hor gtsang 'jigs med (2009), *Huang zhengqing yu wu shi jiamuyang* (1989), *Gcig sgril sa khul gyi tsho*

Linxia in Gansu, and the sudden rise of some of its members from small merchants and peasants to influential provincial leaders was closely connected with their outstanding military skills and political instincts as is demonstrated by the appointment of Ma Haiyan's son, Ma Qi (1869-1931), as the governor of the newly founded province of Qinghai by the Republican Government of China in 1928.<sup>30</sup> After Ma Qi's death in 1931 his brother, Ma Lin (1873?-1945), succeeded him as provincial governor until he was replaced by Ma Qi's son, Ma Bufang (1902-1973) in 1936, when Ma Lin was considered too old and weak to deal with the communists who were approaching Qinghai on their Long March.<sup>31</sup>

In 1916, Ma Qi introduced a rigid modernization program for Qinghai Province and intended to finance it with taxes and fees as well as through the exploitation of timber and other natural resources such as gold and coal, which were mostly located in Tibetan inhabited areas. Since Qinghai contained relatively limited agricultural lands, revenues accrued from agricultural taxes were rather small. Therefore,

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*chen gsum gyi lo rgyus* (1992), *Rma lho'i rig gnas dang lo rgyus kyi dpyad yig* (1992), Kang (1963), and Yang (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Apart from Ma Haiyan's clan there were two other influential Muslim Ma clans in Gansu and Qinghai whose families were originally unrelated. The clan of Ma Zhan'ao was based in the Linxia area and had played a prominent role in the Muslim uprisings of the nineteenth century. After having at first fought against the Qing troops dispatched to quell the rebellions, Ma Zhan'ao later changed sides and was then promoted by the Qing court. The clan of Ma Fuxiang was originally based in Lanzhou, but later also became influential in Ningxia. Ma Fuxiang was a candidate for governor of Gansu in the 1920s, but local Chinese opposed the idea of a Muslim governor. Instead his son, Ma Hongkui, married the daughter of the Lanzhou governor, Lu Hongtao, and Ma Fuxiang then received appointments in Mongolia and Ningxia. In the first decade of the twentieth century both Ma Fuxiang and Ma Haiyan's son, Ma Qi, served as high-ranking officers under Ma Zhan'ao's son, Ma Anliang, in the provincial army of Gansu. However, Ma Fuxiang and Ma Anliang were not on good terms and when Ma Fuxiang was appointed military commander of Xining in 1912, Ma Anliang intervened with the result that Ma Fuxiang was sent to Ningxia and Ma Qi became the military commander of Xining, thus marking his rapid rise to power in Qinghai.

<sup>31</sup> Ma Lin was thus recommended by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek) to go on a *hajj* to Mecca, which he did from 1937 to 1938. Therefore, Ma Bufang became the *de facto* ruler of Qinghai already in 1936, and was officially appointed as the new Qinghai governor in 1938.

the Qing Dynasty collected a head tax (*dīng yīn*) from so-called 'tamed' nomads. Ma Qi changed this tax into a production tax (called *cao tou shuì*) in 1916, and subsequently tried to enforce it in all nomadic areas including those of 'untamed' Tibetans. In order to achieve his goals Ma Qi did not hesitate to make use of military force and also skillfully manipulated inter-tribal conflicts and disputes between Tibetan monasteries.<sup>32</sup> Between 1917 and the early 1940s, these actions — together with the complicated grid of competing political interests among the Han Chinese, Hui, and Tibetans — ignited numerous armed conflicts between provincial government troops and local Tibetan populations, resulting in thousands of deaths.<sup>33</sup> In several instances, these conflicts led to unimaginable cruelty on both sides: sources abound in reports of impaled heads, sliced open bellies, cut-off ears, and so on.

Among these events are Ma Qi's early endeavors to enforce unhindered access to gold deposits in the Amnye Machen Range in the heart of Golok territory, and secure undisturbed travel for military convoys from Xining to Yul shul/ Yushu which had become a contentious issue between Sichuan and Gansu/ Qinghai in 1914. This was followed by attempts to integrate the independent Golok nomads politically and militarily into Qinghai Province and to enforce regular tax payments. The conflict between Ma Qi and the A skyong Gong ma/ Ashenjiang gongma Tribe from Golok is just one such example. After the establishment of a military outpost in Yushu by Ma Qi in 1915, several new military stations were opened along the courier route from Xining to Jekundo<sup>34</sup> County seat which skirted the Golok area,<sup>35</sup> and the tribes en route from Xining to Jekundo were

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Lipman (1980:245-250), *Guoluo zangzu zizhizhou gaikuang* (1984:43-49), and Don grub dbang rgyal (1991:153-173). A study titled *The Mgo log and the Muslim Ma Warlords (dmags shed can Ma' rgyud) in A mdo, 1917-1949* was presented by the author at the IATS conference in Vancouver in 2010 and an expanded version is currently being prepared for publication.

<sup>33</sup> With regard to the competing political interests see, for example, Lipman (1980, 1984, and 1990) and Lin (2007 and 2006:41-44, 63-65, 94-98, 111-115).

<sup>34</sup> Skye dgu mdo/ Yushu.

<sup>35</sup> The courier route led from Xining via Lake Gyaring/ Mtsho Skya ring/ Zhalinghu to Jekundo County seat and took about two months to travel,



frequently demanded to provide *ula(g)* (*wula*),<sup>36</sup> i.e., unpaid guides and transport for military caravans. This understandably annoyed the affected tribes. Furthermore, Ma Qi made plans for a major gold mining enterprise at Amnye Machen in 1917 and sent orders to the Gong ma chieftain to allow the mining activities.



FIGURE 4. Muslim warlord Ma Qi (center) at Kumbum Monastery Fair in 1930. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

Gold mining activities in Amdo, mostly gold washing, had been actively propagated by Ma Qi since at least 1916 in several places in Qinghai and repeatedly led to Tibetan opposition, including attacks on the gold washers (Anonymous 1916b:619 and 1917:17).

Despite Ma Qi's orders, the Gong ma tribesmen attacked and killed several of the 200 to 300 gold miners in 1918 because, according to one source, the gold miners had repeatedly looted

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whereas a short-cut straight through the Golok area was thought to take only about three weeks (see Anonymous 1916a:443).

<sup>36</sup> *Ula*, also written *ulag*, apparently derives from the Mongol *ulaga* or Manchu *ula* (Hauer 1952:953), both of which denote relay stations. In Amdo, *ula* referred to *corvée* requested from nomads in the form of providing guides and transport animals to officials free of charge.

nearby nomadic camps. Ma Qi was furious but did not retaliate immediately. However, when in late 1918, the newly appointed magistrate of Jekundo and his twenty troops were apparently attacked by Goloks while taking a short-cut through Golok territory on the way from Xining to Jekundo, Ma Qi reacted by dispatching 1,000 troops on a punitive expedition.<sup>37</sup>



FIGURE 5. A soldier from Gansu/ Qinghai in the 1930s. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton.

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<sup>37</sup> Anonymous 1919a:332.

In August 1920 Ma Qi sent an especially large caravan with provisions from Xining to Yushu that was attacked by about 1,000 Gong ma tribesmen near the Bayankala Mountains. This time Ma Qi sent about 2,000 troops in the early summer of 1921 who thoroughly defeated and looted the Gong ma Tribe and its allies from other A skyong tribes such as the Khang gsar and the Dpon mo tshang.<sup>38</sup> At the end of 1921, the troops returned to Xining with rich booty and several hundred hostages, including the mother of the Gong ma chieftain.<sup>39</sup> Probably in 1922 Klu sdes/ Lude/ Lide (1903?-1933?/ 35?), the female chieftain of the Dpon mo tshang, was sent to Xining by her fellow Goloks to pay ransom for the release of the captured tribe members. It seems that many or even most of them remained in Labrang as hostages for two more years and that during this period, Klu sdes and Ma Lin, the brother of Warlord Ma Qi, established a close relationship. For instance, Klu sdes received the Chinese title Guoluo(he) nüwang, 'Golon Queen', which later led to many colorful reports by Western travelers.<sup>40</sup> One source even claims that Ma Lin took Klu sdes as one of his wives. In fact, Klu sdes' tribe did not suffer from further attacks by the Ma troops during her leadership, instead, the Dpon mo tshang Tribe was ostracized by other Golok tribes.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Dpon mo tshang*/ Hongmaocang, Nüwang buluo, 'Tribe of the Female Chieftain'. After the death of Klu sdes, the last female chieftain, her younger brother, Ralo Dorje (1915?-1967), succeeded her and the tribe was forthwith known as Ra lo tshang/ Ranluocang, 'Ralo's Tribe'.

<sup>39</sup> One source claims that apart from thousands of sheep, yaks, and horses and tons of wool, as many as 500 Tibetan girls were taken from Golok by the soldiers (Anonymous 1921:492).

<sup>40</sup> Klu sdes' mother, Gzi brjid sgröl ma/ Siji zhuoma (~1880 - ~1917), was appointed female leader of the Dpon mo tshang after Gzi brjid sgröl ma's father died without male heir. I am unaware of contemporary sources in which Gzi brjid sgröl ma was already referred to as a 'Golon Queen', but it is reported that the Dalai Lama and/ or the Panchen Lama conferred a Tibetan official title on her (Yang 1995:37). She is also mentioned as a female chieftain in a late nineteenth century western source (Anonymous 1893:768). On these two female Golok chieftains see also Horlemann (2007:101-102).

<sup>41</sup> Klu sdes is said to have periodically resided in Xining during or after these events. Rock reported that Klu sdes became the wife of Ma Qi instead of Ma Lin, but Rock probably confused the names of the Ma brothers (*Qinghai san ma* 1988:71, Yang 2006:131-132, Li and Li 1992:200-201, Rock 1956:123-124, and Rock, unpubl. manuscript A, 3).



FIGURE 6. The 'Golok Queen' (Klu sdes?), her brother (Ra lo?), and other notables at Labrang Monastery. Christian & Missionary Alliance Archives, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Instructive for the study of Tibetan-Muslim relations are also the manifold interactions between the Tibetan Labrang Monastery and the family of the Ma warlords. Labrang was the most important Buddhist monastery in Northeastern Tibet besides, arguably, Kumbum Monastery/ Taersi. It was also a major trading center on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier, facilitated by its location near Linxia (formerly Hezhou), which was the main commercial and religious center of northwest China's Muslims.

Traditionally, in Amdo as elsewhere in Tibet, close trade relations were frequently formed by Tibetan monks and lamas on the one hand and Muslim as well as Chinese merchants on the other. Usually, a portion of donations by Buddhist pilgrims to monasteries, including livestock, salt, precious stones, and medicinal plants, was traded by the monasteries' treasurers through merchants to markets in Gansu and Sichuan. Monks also directly participated in business activities by renting out rooms to merchants for storage and by money lending. Thus, monks, regardless of rank, were regularly involved in trade transactions, some privately, others in the interest

of the monastery. Furthermore, the monasteries were convenient locations for trading activities of third parties during religious festivals and fairs.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, Ma Qi's father, Ma Haiyan, had such a business relationship and perhaps even friendship with the Fourth Jamyang Shaypa (1856-1916), the highest reincarnation of Labrang Monastery. In 1912, Ma Qi took advantage of this relationship by borrowing a substantial amount of silver from Li Zongzhe, the monastery treasurer, to bribe the governor of Gansu to bestow on him the official document of Ma's promotion as military commander of Xining.<sup>43</sup> In 1917-1918, Li Zongzhe, in turn, asked Ma Qi and the governor of Gansu to mediate in a Labrang internal dispute between Li Zongzhe and the regent of the late Fourth Jamyang Shaypa, the Third Balmang Tsang.<sup>44</sup> This induced the Third Balmang Tsang to mobilize Tibetan troops to prevent the interference of the provincial government, which led to military confrontations with government

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<sup>42</sup> The late Thubten Jigme Norbu, an important reincarnate lama and the oldest brother of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, also entertained a close relationship with a Muslim merchant from Amdo (Thubten 1986:138, 141). With regard to money lending see Ekvall (1907:127).

<sup>43</sup> Ma Qi borrowed 200 *liang* of silver and several golden Buddha statues (*Qinghai san ma* 1988:6-8, 28). For further indications of a friendly relationship between the Tibetan-speaking Ma Qi and the Fourth Jamyang Shaypa see Anonymous (1914:181).

<sup>44</sup> According to one version, Li Zongzhe was anonymously accused of entertaining an illicit affair with the wife of a Mongol Prince who resided in Labrang. Li apparently blamed the Third Balmang Tsang for having circulated this slander (Nietupski 1999:84-85 and *Qinghai san Ma* 1988:28-30). According to a somewhat different, but rather muddled report by the then Xining-based China Inland missionary, G Findlay Andrew, Li Zongzhe was the nephew of the late Fourth Jamyang Shaypa who had accumulated great wealth through donations (the so-called 'silver mountain' of the Fourth Jamyang Shaypa). After his death, Li Zongzhe apparently attempted to acquire some of these riches, which he regarded as his deceased uncle's property. These attempts then ignited the anger of Labrang monks and led to Li's flight to Xining (British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection, L/P&S/11/150, file P 1987/1919). Until around 1924, Li Zongzhe continued to meddle in Labrang affairs, apparently supported by Ma Qi and also the family of the late Fourth Jamyang Shaypa, and then retreated to Kumbum Monastery/ Taersi where he lived with his brother Li Jinzhong (*Qinghai san Ma* 1988:31-33, 68; *Gansu sheng zhi* 2003:249-50; and *Huang zhengqing yu wu shi jiamuyang* 1989:16-19).

troops under the command of Ma Qi and Ma Lin. In the end, the Ma troops were victorious and Ma Qi established a military garrison close to Labrang Monastery. He also intervened in order to have the Third Balmang Tsang substituted as regent by Gungthang Rinpoche.<sup>45</sup>

Due to the already existing amalgamation of personal relationships with political and economic interests, further serious conflicts arose in the 1920s between the Ma family and the Tibetan Alo Clan, the family of the Fifth Jamyang Shaypa (1916-1947). These were only settled in 1927 when the new Gansu provincial government intervened and permanently divested the Labrang area from the power sphere of the Ma Clan.<sup>46</sup> Despite great cruelty seen in military confrontations between Tibetans and the Muslim Ma warlords, including destruction of monasteries and mosques, it needs to be stressed that these were not religiously inspired 'holy' wars between Buddhism and Islam, but politically and economically motivated conflicts. In fact, the Ma Warlords did not hesitate to take severe measures against their Muslim co-religionists when they perceived their own dominant position endangered.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The Third Balmang Tsang belonged to the Amchog/ Amuquhu Tribe which, apparently, had come into conflict with Ma Qi already in 1915. The latter had sent a punitive expedition against this tribe after the Amchog Tribe had been accused of repeatedly attacking other tribes and trade caravans and had also refused to pay taxes (*Qinghai san Ma* 1988, 62-63). Consequently, the relationship between the Ma Clan and the Third Balmang Tsang was probably already rather tense before the Li Zongzhe affair unfolded in 1917. Later, in 1918 or 1919, Ma Qi sent another punitive expedition to the Amchog Tribe, massacring approximately 700 people and destroying and looting about thirty monasteries. After the Third Balmang Tsang's death, his tribe surrendered and was later accused by their fellow Tibetans of treachery because they did not participate in a new armed conflict with Ma troops in 1925, but allegedly even robbed the other Tibetan tribes who were involved in the fighting (*Qinghai san Ma* 1988:28-30, 66-67; *Gansu sheng zhi* 2003:249; *Huang zhengqing yu wu shi jiamuyang* 1989:1; and Rock, unpl. manuscript B, 5).

<sup>46</sup> See Nietupski (1999:84-91), *Gansu sheng zhi* (2003:248-251), Li and Li (1992:211-212), *Qinghai sheng zhi* (2001:119-122), and *Qinghai san Ma* (1988:28-30, 66-67).

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, the Hezhou/ Linxia conflicts in 1923 and in the 1930s (*Linxia shizhi* 1995:810 and *Qinghai san ma* 1988:76, 95).



MUSLIM-TIBETAN TRADE RELATIONS AND THE *XIEJIA* INSTITUTION

Trade relations between Tibetans and Muslims took shape in transactions between Muslim merchants and members of the Buddhist clergy and in frequent interaction between neighboring Muslim and Tibetan farming communities, for example, when food supplies or household goods were bought and sold or certain services of artisanship were sought. Furthermore, itinerant Muslim merchants entertained a thriving barter trade with Tibetan nomads on the grassland, which was often based on longstanding 'guest-host relationships'.<sup>48</sup> The Muslim traders as personal guests of a nomad's family, exchanged tea, cloth, and other goods of everyday necessity for such products as wool and hides. In Tibetan areas the 'guest-host relationship' implied such obligations as providing food and lodging, assisting in trade and other affairs of the guest, and being the guarantor for the guest's safety. These obligations were mutual, i.e., the guest would become the host when his former host came to visit.<sup>49</sup>

Compared to local Chinese, the Muslims of Gansu and Qinghai were apparently more courageous and enterprising in terms of traveling under difficult conditions and under the permanent threat of bandit attacks and soon dominated the direct trade with the Tibetan nomads. In addition, the Muslims were generally more willing to adjust to Tibetan ways. They often spoke local Tibetan dialects, dressed in Tibetan style, and adopted Tibetan manners when traveling. Marriages between Tibetan women of the host family and Muslim guest merchants were common and often sealed and deepened the already existing friendships or trade relations between two families (Ekvall 1939:52-56, 62 and Andrew 1921?:30).

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<sup>48</sup> Itinerant traders of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Qinghai were also known as *yangke* 'itinerant sheep traders', presumably because they originally traded their merchandise for the sheep and goats (*yang*) of the Tibetans and the formerly economically and politically dominant Kokonor Mongols (see Cui 1999:388, *Hexi kaifa shi yanjiu* 1996:421, and Nayancheng 1853, *juan* 4, 7-9).

<sup>49</sup> Also some nineteenth and early twentieth century western missionaries used the Chinese term *zhurenjia* to designate their Tibetan nomad host families (Ekvall 1907:143-144, Ekvall 1939:54-55, and Snyder 1905:136-137).



FIGURE 7. Scene from a border market in Gansu/ Qinghai in the 1930s. *Steyle Missionsbote* May 1939, 66:8, 199.



FIGURE 8. Traders in Tibetan clothing in Gansu/ Qinghai in the 1930s. Archivum Generale of the Societas Verbi Divini, Rome.

A similar but rather institutionalized form of trade with Tibetan nomads was the *xiejia* system that has received little attention from



western scholars.<sup>50</sup> During the Ming and Qing dynasties the owner of a *xiejia*, i.e., 'house of repose' or 'inn',<sup>51</sup> provided food and lodging for travelers and also had semi-official functions with regard to trade control, tax collection, and legal affairs. While the *xiejia* system was gradually abandoned in central China starting from the eighteenth century, it gained increasing importance in China's northwest, especially Qinghai. The important border market Stong 'khor/Dan'gaer<sup>52</sup> on the Sino-Tibetan frontier, about fifty kilometers west of Xining, may serve as an example. The Stong 'khor *xiejia* were mostly run by Tibetan-speaking Muslims and several Han Chinese families who provided food and lodging to Tibetan nomads and to their usually numerous transport animals free of charge.<sup>53</sup> In return, they asked for a certain percentage of the profits the nomads gained while trading their products at the local market with the assistance of the respective *xiejia* owners, who served as middlemen. Furthermore, the inn-keepers frequently offered other trade-related services, such as loans, storage of goods, and transportation to inner China. Most Tibetan tribes had specific *xiejia* at which they stayed each time when they came to border markets to trade. This often led to long-lasting trade relations and sometimes to close friendships or even to family

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<sup>50</sup> Although the *xiejia* system in Amdo is occasionally mentioned in late nineteenth and early twentieth century western travelogues, the bulk of written material consists of Chinese sources such as gazetteers, official documents, and travelogues. Written Tibetan material has not yet come to my attention. See, for example, Nayancheng (1853, *juan* 4), *Qing miaocong yi huangdi shilu* (*juan* 21), *Qing xuanzong cheng huangdi shilu* (*juan* 42, 46, 50), Yang (1910:274, 287), Xu (1917:76-77), Hu and Huo (2006:22-26), Wang (1987:77-84), Ma and He (1994:26-29), Pu and Yi (1981:37-41), Huc and Gabet (1987:I, 386-387, II, 1, 18), and Tafel (1914/1:180-181, 184, 204-205).

<sup>51</sup> The term *xiejia* also designates 'owner of the hostel' and 'inn-keeper'. In this article I use *xiejia* only in the sense of 'hostel' or 'inn' and usually refer to the inn-keeper as 'the *xiejia* owner'. Furthermore, there were two categories of *xiejia*, the *guan xiejia*, i.e., the 'officially acknowledged' *xiejia*, and the *si xiejia*, i.e., the 'private' or 'illegal' *xiejia*. *Xiejia* are sometimes also called *xiedian*.

<sup>52</sup> Modern Huangyuan is also spelled Stong skor in Tibetan. Western sources include Dankar, Tanko, Donkyr, and Tang-Keou-Eul.

<sup>53</sup> The *xiejia* system was also in place in Amdo for local Mongols and, for some time, the Monguor population. Han Chinese had their own inns that excluded Tibetans and Mongols.

ties between the Tibetan customers and the *xiejia* owners. While in the early and mid-nineteenth century the Tibetan tribes had fixed *xiejia* at which they were obliged to stay, the system became more flexible in the late nineteenth century. For 1904 it is recorded that Tibetans in Stong 'khor chose from among a number of *xiejia*, however, they were still forbidden to stay at hostels for Chinese merchants and travelers (Tafel 1914/I:180).

First the Qing administration and later the warlords took advantage of this situation by taxing the *xiejia* and transferring certain duties to the hostel owners. For example, the *xiejia* owners were obliged to assist the Chinese border officials in controlling trade regulations and to serve as interpreters or mediators in conflicts with Tibetan tribes. During the international wool boom in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the *xiejia* owners also served as middlemen for the foreign wool trading companies.

Not surprisingly, when the middlemen served several masters simultaneously, conflicts of interest arose. Thus *xiejia* owners were frequently accused of exploiting the inexperience and naivety of their Tibetan customers, and even of outright fraud.<sup>54</sup> However, Tibetan nomads also cleverly attempted to increase their profits, for example, by mixing sand into wool or drenching it with water to make it heavier. Although there is no hard data available on how the booming wool trade and the rapidly increasing wool prices affected the income of Tibetan nomads, there are indications that they also profited handsomely. One such indicator was the nomads' growing demand for and their improving supply of comparatively expensive firearms. While in the second half of the nineteenth century their weapons were usually described as poor and outdated, this changes markedly in the early twentieth century. It is also striking that the Amdo nomads of the early twentieth century were frequently described as

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<sup>54</sup> In fact, according to Chinese and foreign sources, the *xiejia* owners were ill-famed throughout most of their history. In western accounts, especially the Chinese and Muslim petty traders, the so-called *diaolangzi* (literally: cunning fox), who offered such daily-use articles as boots, knives, pots, and so on at various markets in Amdo, had the reputation of cheating their customers, specifically pastoralists, who were often unaware of ordinary market prices (Huc and Gabet 1987 II:17, Rijnhart 1901:134, and Haack 1940:12).

rich or well off and as having a higher social status than their sedentary compatriots. Apart from the nomads' weapons, the wealth and beauty of the nomad women's jewellery is repeatedly mentioned admiringly by western observers.<sup>55</sup>

In sum, during most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the *xiejia* institution played an important role in Muslim-Tibetan trade relations in major Sino-Tibetan border markets in Qinghai such as Stong 'khor where the bulk of the wool trade took place. It should also be noted that the *xiejia* system in Amdo was not static, but its role developed and changed over time.<sup>56</sup>



FIGURE 9. Tibetan chief's daughter (center) in wedding dress with gold threads worth 3,000 Mexican dollars, 1934. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Filchner (1906:14 fn. 2), Andrew (1921?:30), Teichman (1922:77), Ekvall (1939:77-79, 81), Hermanns (1949:54-56, 223-224, 233), Xuan (2002:98), and Tafel (1914/1:286-287).

<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed study on the *xiejia* see Horlemann (2012).

## FINAL REMARKS

By using these examples of the multi-dimensional relationships between Tibetans and Muslims on the Sino-Tibetan frontier, my intention has been to show that 'interethnic hatred' and religious differences alone are insufficient to explain Muslim-Tibetan conflicts. The case of the mid-nineteenth century Baoan Muslims demonstrates that land and irrigation rights can easily become contentious in farming communities. Existing interethnic problems can be further aggravated by measures taken by provincial and local administrations regarding military issues and by religious institutions that also wield economic power as landlords. In contrast, the Ma warlords attempted to pursue their political and economic goals against a largely opposing population of whom a major part were Tibetans. Their main motivation was therefore not 'interethnic hatred' or a war of religions, but the Ma Clan's personal economic and political interests. Close trade relations between Tibetans and Muslims, however, provide evidence of how mutual economic interests overcame ethnic barriers and even resulted in Muslim-Tibetan marriages. Therefore, studies on the past and present relations between Tibetans and Muslims call for a closer examination of socio-economic and political factors while bearing in mind the great complexity and the many local differences in Tibetan and Muslim communities.

This paper has highlighted only a few aspects that shaped Muslim-Tibetan relations in the past by providing three very different examples. Left unexplored are many other possible causes for conflict that deserve further study, such as the impact of waves of immigration of Han Chinese and Hui from neighboring provinces in the aftermath of famines, natural catastrophes, and conflicts, and how this increasing population pressure in certain areas in Gansu and Qinghai influenced interethnic relations. The 'Muslim revolts' of the nineteenth century, for instance, led to an increased influx of Chinese Muslims from Shaanxi and other provinces into Gansu and Qinghai through forced resettlements.<sup>57</sup> The role of religious institutions as political and economic players also needs more extensive research.

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<sup>57</sup> With regard to migration waves of Han Chinese from Hunan, Shaanxi, and Shanxi into the Linxia area during the Qing Dynasty and the Republican era

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see Lian (2006:370). For the resettlement of Muslims in Qinghai and Gansu see *Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou zhi* (1999:1348), *Hualong xian zhi* (1994:657-658, 667), *Linxia shizhi* (1995:780), and *Qinghai jianshi* (1992:174-175).

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A

A skyong gong ma ཨ་སྐྱོང་གོང་མ།, A shen jiang gong ma 阿什姜贡麻  
Alo, A blo ཨ་བློ།  
Amchog, A mchog ཨ་མཚོག།, Amuquhu 阿木曲乎  
Amdo, A mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
Amnye Machen, A myes rma chen ཨ་མྱེས་རྩ་ཆེན།  
*awangcang* 阿旺仓  
*axiang* 阿香

B

Balmang Tsang, Dbal mang tshang བཟུང་མང་ཆང་།,  
Amangcang 阿莽仓  
Baoran 保安  
Bayankala 巴颜喀拉  
Bayanrong, Ba yan rong བ་ཡན་རྩ་རྒྱ།, Hualong 化隆  
Bod hu'i བོད་ཏུ་བྱེ།, E hui 哦回

C

*cao tou shui* 草头税

D

Dan'gaer 丹噶尔, Stong 'khor སྟོང་འཁོར།  
Dgu rong ཏུ་རྩ་རྒྱ།  
*diaolangzi* 刁郎子  
*ding yin* 丁银  
*dmags shed can mA rgyud* ཨ་མདོ་དམག་ས་ཤེད་མུ་རྒྱུད།  
Dpon mo tshang དཔོན་མོ་ཆང་།, Hongmaocang 红毛仓/ Nüwang buluo 女  
王部落  
Dongxiang 东乡  
Duosaidong 朵赛东, Duoazedong 朵泽东

G

Ganhetan 干河滩  
Gannan 甘南  
Gansu 甘肃  
Gedimu 格底目  
Gling rgyal གླིང་རྒྱལ། Langjia 郎加  
Golok, mgo log མགོ་ལོག།, Guoluo 果洛/ Guoluohu 果洛和

*guan xiejia* 官歇家

Guide 贵德, Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

Gungthang Rinpoche, Gung thang rin po che གུང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།

*Guoluo(he) nüwang* 果洛(和)女王

Gzi brjid sgrol ma གཙུ་བཟླ་སྒོ་ལ་མ།, Siji zhuoma 斯吉卓玛

## H

Han 汉

Helongnaka 合隆那卡

Hezhou 河州

*hua'er* 花儿

Hualong 化隆

Hualong Huizu zizhixian 化隆回族自治县

Huanghe 黄河

Huangnan Zangzu zizhizhou 黄南藏族自治州

Huangyuan 湟源

Hui 回

Huzhu Tu 互助土

Huzhu Tuzu zizhixian 互助土族自治县

## J

Jamyang Shaypa, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa འཇམ་མགས་དབྱངས་བཟའ་པ།

Jekundo, Skye dgu mdo རྟེན་གྲུ་མདོ།, Yushu 玉树

Jishishan 积石山

Jishishan Baoan Dongxiang Salazu zizhixian 积石山保安东乡撒拉族自治县

## K

Khang gsar ཁང་གསར།

Klu sdes ལུ་སྡེ།, Lude 鲁德/ Lide 李德

Kokonor, Mtsho sngon po མཚོ་སྔན་པོ།, Qinghaihu 青海湖

Kumbum, Sku 'bum byams pa gling ལྷ་འབུམ་བླ་མས་པ་གླིང་།, Taersi 塔尔寺

## L

Labrang, Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil ལྷ་བླ་བརྟ་ཁེ་ཤིས་འཁྱིལ།, Labulengsi 拉卜楞寺

*lama, bla ma* ལྷ་མ།

Lanzhou 兰州

*laojiao* 老教/ Khufiyya

Li Jinzhong 李金钟

Li Zongzhe 李宗哲

Linxia 临夏

Lu Hongtao 陆洪涛

M

Ma Anliang 马安良

Ma Bufang 马步芳, MA pu'u h+phang མ་པུ་མ་ཕང་།

Ma Fuxiang 马福祥

Ma Haiyan 马海宴

Ma Hongkui 马鸿逵

Ma Laichi 马来迟

Ma Lin 马麟, MA len མ་ལེན་།

Ma Mingxin 马明心

Ma Qi 马麒, MA chi མ་ཆེ།/ chis ཆེས།

Ma Shou 马寿

Ma Wanfu 马万福/ Ma Guoyuan 马果园

Ma Zhan'ao 马占鳌

Maba 麻巴

Meipo 梅坡

Menggu 蒙古

*menhuan* 门宦

Minhe Huizu Tuzu zizhixian 民和回族土族自治县

Minhe Tu 民和土

*minzu chouhen* 民族仇恨

*minzu maodun* 民族矛盾

Monguor, Tuzu 土族

Mtsho Skya ring མཚོ་སྐྱ་རིང་།, Zhalinghu 扎陵湖

N

Ningxia 宁夏

Q

Qing 清

Qinghai 青海

R

Ra lo tshang ར་ལོ་ཙང་།, Ranluocang 然洛仓

Ralo Dorje, Ra lo rdo rje ར་ལོ་རྡོ་རྗེ།, Ranluo Duoqi 然洛多吉

Reb gong རེབ་གོང་།, Tongren 同仁

rinpoche, *rin po che* རིན་པོ་ཆེ།

Rma chu མ་ཆུ།, Huanghe 黄河

Rnying ma pa རྟིང་མ་པ།

Rong bo རོང་བོ།

## S

Salar, Sala 撒拉

Shaanxi 陕西

Shabkar, Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol ཞབས་དཀར་ཚོགས་དྲུག་རང་གྲོ།

Shanxi 山西

*si xiejia* 私歇家

Sichuan 四川

Skye dgu mdo སྐེ་དུ་མདོ།, Yushu 玉树

Stong 'khor སྟོང་ཁོར།, Dan'gaer 丹噶尔

## T

Taozhou 洮州

Tongren Tu 同仁土

*tusi* 土司

Tuyuhun 吐谷浑

## U

*ula(g), wula* 乌拉

## W

*wula* 乌拉

## Y

*yangke* 羊客

## X

Xianfeng 咸丰

*xiedian* 歇点

*xiejia* 歇家

*xinjiao* 新教/ Jahriyya

Xining 西宁

Xinjiang 新疆

*xinxinjiao* 新新教/ *yihewani* 伊赫瓦尼/ Ikhwani

Xunhua 循化

Xunhua Salazu zizhixian 循化撒拉族自治县

Xunhua *ting* 循化厅

## Y

Yugur, Yugu 裕固

Yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།, Yushu 玉树

Yunnan ཡུ་ནན་

Z

Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol ཞབས་དཀར་ཚོགས་རྒྱལ་རང་གྲོ།

*zhurenjia* 主人家

# SACRED DAIRIES, DAIRYMEN, AND BUFFALOES OF THE NILGIRI MOUNTAINS IN SOUTH INDIA

Anthony R. Walker (Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; former Professor of Anthropology, University of Brunei Darussalam)

## ABSTRACT

Approximately 1,500 Toda people inhabit the Nilgiri Mountains in south India. Arguably the most remarkable characteristic of Toda culture is the sacred nature of the husbandry of herds of long-horned mountain water buffaloes. No other community in India has so single-mindedly focused its ritual attention on one particular animal species. Every important task associated with the buffalo herds – milking, milk-processing, giving salt, naming, seasonal migrations, burning pastures, introducing new equipment into the dairies, etc. – has been embellished with ritual. Todas make a clear-cut distinction between temple and domestic buffaloes. Ordinary men (but not women) herd the latter, whose milk and milk-products (buttermilk, butter, and clarified butter), but not flesh (since the community espouses vegetarianism) may be consumed, bartered, or sold without restriction. Males who are responsible for herding temple buffaloes conduct their daily lives in a manner preserving greater ritual purity than ordinary men. Moreover, they are not just dairymen, but also the community's priests. They must guard the ritual purity of the dairies they serve, and all that is in them, for these are the Todas' temples – sacred places, infused with divinity.

## KEYWORDS

Todas, Nilgiri Mountains, pastoralism, water buffaloes, dairy-temples, ritual purity, ritual hierarchy

## INTRODUCTION

India is renowned as the land of the sacred cow (*Bos indicus*). However, relatively few people are aware of the existence, atop the Nilgiri Mountains in the southeastern state of Tamil Nadu, of a small, traditionally pastoral, community that honors and ritualizes the subcontinent's "other bovine" (Hoffpauir 1982), the water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*). Indeed, the fervor with which this community extols its buffaloes far exceeds that which the majority of Hindu Indians demonstrate towards their sacred cows.

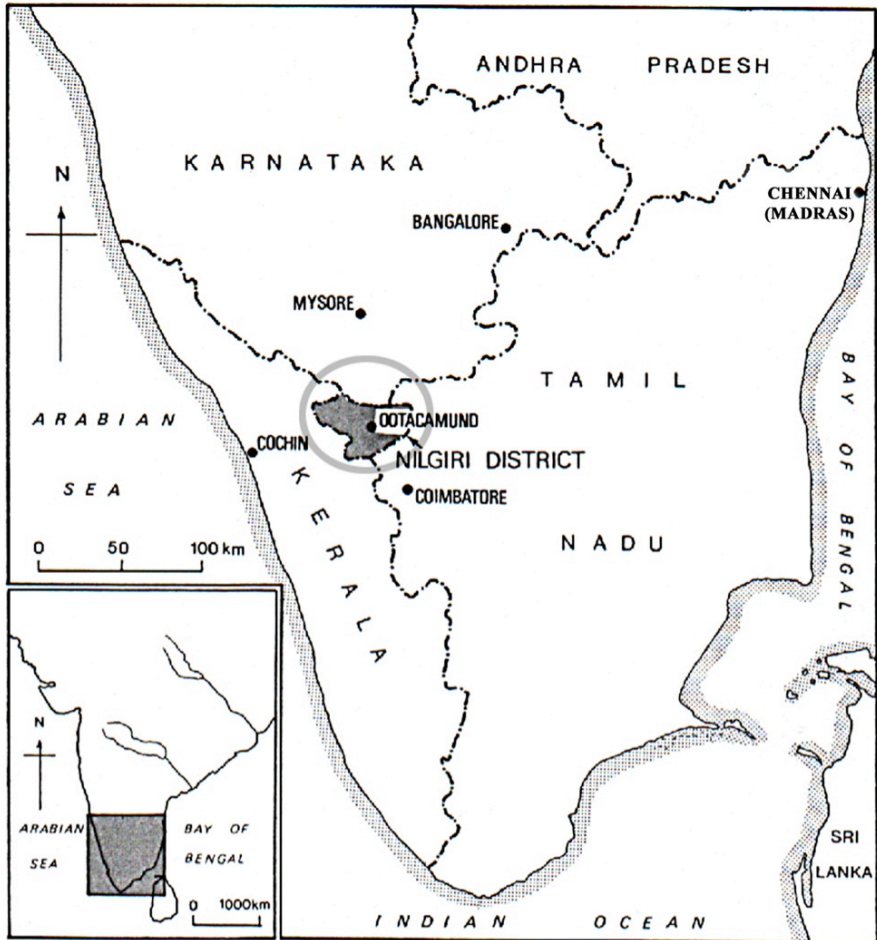
These people are the Todas,<sup>1</sup> who so elevated the task of herding buffaloes that it became not merely their principal economic strategy, but also their central religious activity. As the late University of California linguist Murray B. Emeneau so succinctly wrote almost three quarters of a century ago (Emeneau 1938:111-12):

The religion of the Todas is a highly ritualized buffalo-cult. Every important operation connected with the buffaloes is conducted according to rule, milking and converting the milk successively into butter and ghee, giving salt to the buffaloes, taking them on migration to fresh pastures, burning over the pastures, giving a buffalo a name when it has calved for the first time, introducing new utensils into the dairy and preparing new coagulant for the milk, rebuilding and re-thatching the dairy, consecrating dairymen, and even drinking buttermilk from the dairy. All the rules apply to the sacred buffaloes; ordinary ones are treated with much less ceremony. Infractions of the rules involve pollution, and most of the precautions surrounding the cult seem designed to prevent pollution of the milk by contact with profane persons or utensils. The milk, as the primary product, is most liable to pollution and the successive operations finally result in ghee, which possesses so little sanctity that it can be sold to outsiders.

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<sup>1</sup> The most detailed ethnographic studies of the Todas are those by Rivers (for whom, see Walker 2012e), especially Rivers (1906), Emeneau (for whom, see Hockings 2012c), particularly Emeneau (1967: 224-356, 1971, 1974, and 1984) and Walker (1986). Another, by Ootacamund-based Tarun Chhabra (MS 2012) will be published shortly.





**THE NILGIRI DISTRICT, HOMELAND OF THE TODA PEOPLE, IN SOUTH INDIA**

FIGURE 1. Location of the Toda homeland, the Nilgiri Mountains in South India, where three modern-day Indian states meet: Tamil Nadu (east), Kerala (south and west), and Karnataka (north). Nilgiris District, the smallest and most northwesterly such administrative unit in Tamil Nadu, covers an area of 2,548 square kilometers. It lies eleven degrees north of the equator at the juncture of the Eastern and Western Ghats. Two thirds of the district comprises a mountain plateau with peaks rising to 2,637 meters. In 2001, the District's population was 764,826 with the Toda constituting just over one percent. Map: ©The author.



FIGURE 2. Toda elder, Matsod of the Melgaash Clan at Pawsh Hamlet in 1963. Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 3. Kerodz of the Melgaash Clan at Pawsh Hamlet in 1963.  
Photograph: ©The author.



The Toda community – little more than a thousand strong<sup>2</sup> – has shared the Nilgiri toplands, probably for millennia, with Kotas and Ālu-Kurumbas and, for more than four centuries, also with Badagas.<sup>3</sup>

Until far into the twentieth century the Todas were primarily a pastoral community, resolutely shunning farming in favor of tending their great herds of mountain water buffaloes over the undulating and, until recently, grass-covered Nilgiri toplands.<sup>4</sup>



FIGURE 4. Wenlock Downs during the monsoon. 'Mashor' is the term Todas use for this seventy-eight square kilometer area of rolling, grass-covered downs at 2,100 to 2,300 meters above sea level. The British named the downs after Lord Wenlock, a one-time Governor of the Madras Presidency. This British era name survives to this day. Photograph: ©The author.

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Toda demographics, see Walker (2012c).

<sup>3</sup> The following sources give an overview of these peoples: for Kotas, Basu (1972), Mandelbaum (1938, 1955a, 1955b 1956, 1959), Verghese (1969), and Wolf (1992, 2012a, 2012b); for Badagas, Hockings (1980a, 1980b, 1989, 1999, 2012b, and 2012d); and for Kurumbas, Kapp and Hockings (1989), and Demmer (2012a, 2012b, and 2012c). Demmer writes specifically of the Jēnu Kurumbas, while the Todas have maintained much closer relations with the Ālu Kurumbas, studied by Kapp (1982).

<sup>4</sup> For the degradation of the Nilgiri grasslands, particularly in the post-Independence period, see Noble (2012b). For details of the Nilgiri grasses, see Chhabra et al. (2002).



FIGURE 5. Particularly since the 1960s, the Government of Tamil Nadu has covered large expanses of grassland with exotic trees, most notably eucalyptus (middle ground of the picture) and acacia. For countless centuries, Todas used such grasslands for pasturing buffaloes. Simultaneously, on both sides of India's Independence, numerous hydro-electric projects have caused rivers to be dammed to form reservoirs (an example in the middle ground, right of picture) that have inundated significant areas of former Toda pasturage. The wooded area in the right background of the photograph comprises indigenous Nilgiri vegetation. Such woodlands, concentrated in shallow depressions, are known locally as *sholas*. Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 6. Naricane of the Melgaash Clan poses in front of a herd of Toda buffalo grazing on Wenlock Downs in 1962, in the heart of Toda country. Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 7. Pawsh Hamlet of the Melgaash patriclan in 1974, located in the Avalanche area. The hamlet then had four barrel-vaulted domestic houses in traditional style; main buffalo pen (square) and smaller subsidiary pen (round) at right; small front-gabled sheds house buffalo calves at night. To the right is a typical Nilgiri *shola*. The hamlet had recently been connected to the electrical grid, hence poles and pylons. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.

These buffalo herders have traditionally occupied exclusively Toda settlements, with their unique domestic and religious architecture.<sup>5</sup> They speak a language confined to their own community that belongs to the Dravidian family (like those of their neighbors in the mountains and on the plains), but separated from a common Tamil-Malayalam background more than two millennia ago, before Tamil and Malayalam became distinct tongues.<sup>6</sup> The community subscribes to religious beliefs and ritual practices infused with pan-Indic themes: purity, pollution, hierarchy, caste endogamy, clan exogamy, etc., but which, nonetheless, are uniquely Toda.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For details see Noble (1966, 2012a)

<sup>6</sup> For linguistic sources, see Emeneau (1958b and 1984); Emeneau's linguistic successors are S. Sakthivel (1976) and Bhaskararao (2012).

<sup>7</sup> For confirmation of this statement, see Walker (1986) and compare the sections on Toda religious ideology and practice with other anthropological

Until the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, Todas lived in a hierarchically-ordered, caste-like economic, social, and ritual symbiosis with their close neighbors: the agriculturally-based Badagas and artisan Kotas on the plateau and the swidden farming and gathering-and-hunting Kurumbas and Irulas<sup>8</sup> of the Nilgiri slopes. They exchanged their dairy products with these people, particularly ghee (clarified butter), for food grains, tools, pottery, jewelry, and forest products, and were bound to them by various ritual and social obligations.<sup>9</sup> From the late 1820s, the Toda homelands were invaded by outsiders, beginning with British administrators, soldiers, and planters, who were quickly followed by numerous Tamil- and Kannada-speaking castes from the plains to the north and east of the Nilgiris. Outsiders soon outnumbered the autochthones.<sup>10</sup>

Venison and wild boar seem once to have been a part of the Todas' diet,<sup>11</sup> but for at least the last two centuries the community has espoused vegetarianism, offering this as a prime reason for its superior ranking in the hierarchy of indigenous peoples. Except in one specific ritual context, in which male calves were sacrificed and their flesh eaten,<sup>12</sup> Todas have had no use for their buffaloes' meat. On the occasions of funerals, when they sacrifice buffaloes to accompany their loved ones to the realm of the dead, the carcasses (traditionally presented to hereditary Kota friends in return,

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studies of South Indian ideologies, such as Srinivas (1952) or Dumont (1986).

<sup>8</sup> For an ethnographic survey of the Irulas, see Zvelebil (1988). Toda interaction with the Irulas was traditionally far less intense than with the Kotas, Badagas, and Kurumbas.

<sup>9</sup> For discussions of inter-community relations among the traditional Nilgiri peoples, see Mandelbaum (1941), Zvelebil (1955), Hockings (1965:20-23, 1980:99-133), and Walker (1986:20-39).

<sup>10</sup> For the impact of British administrative, commercial, and social penetration of the Nilgiris, see Hockings (1989, 2012b), Kennedy (1996), and Kenny (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Fenicio (1603); English translation by Alberti (in Rivers 1906:720-30).

<sup>12</sup> Rivers (1906:274-75), Peter (1960), and Walker (1986:179-82, 2008). The last reference contains pencil sketches (based on Rivers's scarcely decipherable photographs) by Pudarno Binchin, Bruneian ethnologist and museum curator.



especially, for funerary music) are sold to Nilgiri butchers who are mostly Muslims.

The principal grain-growers on the mountains, the Badagas, whose pre-seventeenth century origins lie in the Karnataka plains,<sup>13</sup> from the mid-nineteenth century onwards began cultivating commercial cash-crops: tea,<sup>14</sup> coffee,<sup>15</sup> and cool-weather vegetables.<sup>16</sup> As they did so, they began opting out of their traditional role as food providers to the Todas. From the 1930s, the Kotas (who, with the Todas, are true aborigines of the Nilgiri toplands) began an upward mobility campaign in an attempt to raise their status in the local caste hierarchy. This involved abandoning practices deemed ritually defiling and grounds for social denigration. One of these was providing music for Toda and Badaga funerals, which caused the

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<sup>13</sup> Hockings (1980a:11-44, 2012c) argues cogently for Badaga migrations in several distinct waves into the Nilgiris from the southern Karnataka Plain. He maintains that such migrations began sometime in the mid-sixteenth century and intensified during the seventeenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century, these various peasant immigrants from Karnataka had likely coalesced to form a distinct and, since the early nineteenth century, closed Nilgiri upland community.

Among the principal characteristics mentioned as linking Badagas with Karnataka is language. The Badaga language (Badagu) is variously stated to be 'Kannada' (or Kannarese), 'a dialect of Kannada', or else 'a separate language, closely related to Kannada'. Recently, however, Pilot-Raichoor (2012) has argued that Badagu's Kannada affiliations have been over-emphasized at the expense of its Tamiloid connections. Noting the linguistic similarities between Badagu and Ālu-Kurumba – indubitably a Tamiloid tongue – she offers the radical hypothesis that, while some ancestral Badaga may have migrated from Karnataka, the people we know today as 'the Badagas' may not have coalesced into a distinct community until a few centuries ago, at which time it may well have incorporated both immigrants and significant numbers of people who had all along been natives of these mountains.

<sup>14</sup> For the history of tea cultivation in the Nilgiris dating to 1854, see Muthiah (2012).

<sup>15</sup> "The Nilgiris District produces hardly any coffee these days; yet it was coffee... that opened out the earliest plantations here," notes Muthiah (2012a:214) at the start of his useful adumbration of the history and former economic importance of coffee in the District.

<sup>16</sup> Hockings (2012a).



entire Kota community to be permanently associated with death pollution.<sup>17</sup>

In this manner, the traditional symbiosis between the Nilgiri peoples began breaking down, forcing Todas to innovate in both economic and ritual spheres. In the economic sphere, milk products once bartered with hereditary friends from other castes were now sold for cash in Nilgiri markets and through dairy cooperatives, and the income used to purchase the food grains and artifacts once obtained from Badaga and Kota partners. In the ritual sphere, old practices were abandoned or modified to meet new circumstances. For example, traditional Kota musicians were replaced by professional bands of lowland background hired in Nilgiri towns.

#### TODA COMMUNITY SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Some basic knowledge of the social organization of this unique community is essential for grasping the complexity of Toda pastoralism in both economic and ritual dimensions.

The person who, to an outsider, is simply a Toda, among his or her own people is a member of several different social groups. He or she belongs to one of two endogamous sub-castes into which the community is divided.<sup>18</sup> Because there are only two, whereas

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<sup>17</sup> See Mandelbaum (1960) for Kota efforts to raise their position in the local Nilgiri caste hierarchy.

<sup>18</sup> Bhaskarrarao (2012:924) castigates me for labeling these subdivisions 'sub-castes', saying that such "[u]sage would assume usage of the word 'caste' for the Todas in general." *That* is precisely my intent. But this is not to say the Government of India's designation of the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas et al. (but not Badagas) as 'scheduled tribes' is unimportant, still less unacceptable to the people so designated. Instead, it affirms that the term 'tribe' lacks comparative sociological validity (Walker 1998:143-50). But I am greatly indebted to Bhaskarrarao (2012), for pointing out Emeneau's (1958a: 273) use of the term 'sub-caste' to substitute for 'moiety', almost three decades before the publication of my first book on the Todas in 1986. Inexcusably, I had missed that datum in my reading of Emeneau's corpus, which, given the esteemed place Emeneau occupies in Toda and Indological studies, surely provides significant support for my own use of his terminological innovation.

commonly in India there would be more, in much of the literature on Todas these major divisions are termed 'moieties'.<sup>19</sup> A Toda is also a member of an exogamous patrilineal clan, which, apart from its constituent hamlets and households, is also segmented into ritual and economic units. In addition he or she is a member of an exogamous matrilineal clan, which has no further subdivisions. Finally, there are kin and affinal groups.

The major cleavages of Toda society – the ones that most affect the ritual dimension of Toda pastoralism – are those represented by the endogamous sub-castes, respectively named Torthash-olkh and Töwfilly-olkh (*olkh* means 'people'),<sup>20</sup> and by the exogamous patrilineal clans or *mod-olkh*.

The Toda language has no generic word for 'sub-caste'. Todas refer to persons of the opposite sub-caste as their *soty*, a term derived from the Sanskrit word *jati* – the common Indian term for, among other things, an endogamous caste or sub-caste. The etymologies of the sub-caste names are apparently unknown to modern Todas, although Emeneau<sup>21</sup> ventures the following derivations: Torthash from *tor* 'important people', plus *thash* 'state of being' (no doubt a reference to the dominant position of this sub-caste, which dwarfs the Töwfilly people demographically [three to one] and owns the community's most sacred dairy-temples and associated buffalo herds); and Töwfilly (from *-filly* = *pilly* meaning 'servants' of the *töw* 'gods'), doubtless reflecting the crucial role that male members of this sub-caste traditionally played as priests and dairymen for the community's most sacred dairies and herds.<sup>22</sup>

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The removal of the term 'sub-caste' from my contribution (Walker 2012:650-51) for the *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills* was an editorial decision to which I had, reluctantly, to agree.

<sup>19</sup> I explain my dislike of the term 'moiety' in reference to Toda social organization in Walker (1998:57-58).

<sup>20</sup> I render Toda words in a simplified manner and with much use of hyphenation, seeking to approximate Toda pronunciation. For more rigorous orthography, consult Emeneau (1958b) and Burrow and Emeneau (1984).

<sup>21</sup> See especially Emeneau (1966:26-28; 1974:6).

<sup>22</sup> See below, Rivers (1906:83-84ff), and Walker (1986:145-56). Recently, Tarun Chhabra (MS 2012), who speaks the language fluently, has provided slightly different derivations: Torthash from *tor*, the general name for a

Each Toda sub-caste is divided into a number of *mod*, 'named exogamous patrilineal clans.' At present Torthash has ten such divisions and Töwfilly five. Patriclan affiliation is determined during a rite performed during the mother's pregnancy, when a man formally accepts paternity of the unborn child, thus bestowing upon it membership in his patriclan.<sup>23</sup> Adoption is unknown, thus birth is the only means by which a patriclan recruits its male members; females are incorporated through marriage.

The notion of hierarchy characteristic of the relations between the two sub-castes, is minimal with respect to the patriclans, although one enjoys a certain ritual primacy due to its association with Goddess Tökishy, the preeminent Toda deity.

Every patriclan owns a number of hamlets and its name is normally derived from that of its principal settlement. Several patriclans have specific heroic figures associated with them, but these are not clan ancestors *per se*. Besides its hamlets, which are not necessarily contiguous, each patriclan owns at least two *kedr-mod* 'funeral places', one for males and one for females, while a number of Torthash patriclans own isolated dairy-temple complexes of various degrees of sanctity, including the most sacred of all, the now un-operated *tee* dairies. Clan property also includes the domestic hamlet sites themselves, their dairy-temples, and some of the more sacred grades of buffalo.

There are four additional sociologically significant divisions within the patriclan: *kwir*, *polm*, hamlet, and household. The *kwir* divisions (the term *kwir* 'horn' reflects the binary nature of the segmentation) become operative on certain ritual occasions when it is necessary to expiate offences or counteract misfortune. The *polm* 'portion', on the other hand, are not binary divisions; some patriclans have only two but others, three, four, or five. *Polm* divisions function when it is necessary to collect or distribute money; each division,

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patriclan, and *tash*, 'higher', thus 'clans that are higher' (than those of the other subcaste). The etymology of Töwfilly, Chhabra tells us, is more difficult to explain, but his principal informant and teacher in all things Toda, maintains that the name is derived from '*töw*', 'gods', and '*folly*', 'temples', thus 'men who serve in the gods' temples'.

<sup>23</sup> For the ritual details, see Walker (1986:190-92, 1998:81-88, 2012b).

irrespective of the size of its membership, is expected to contribute an equal share.

The third level of patrician segmentation is the hamlet. Clansmen have the right to live in any of their patrician's hamlets, but outsiders may do so only by invitation. The hamlet is an economic unit of sorts – the care of the buffaloes being largely hamlet-based, with all the animals penned and pastured together. However, every family milks its own domestic buffaloes, while a special dairymen-priest is responsible for the hamlet's sacred dairy-temple operations. An explication of Toda ideas concerning 'temple' and 'domestic' buffaloes, and of their dairy-temple, constitutes a major part of what follows.

At the lowest level of patrician segmentation is the household, the people who occupy a single dwelling (*aash*). In modern times the Toda household usually comprises a nuclear family of husband, wife, and unmarried children, sometimes augmented by the widowed parent of the household head and/ or the head's married son, wife, and children. Other than in the case of a widow with young children, the household head is always a man – husband and father of the nuclear family, or the grown son of a widow. He is the owner of the household property: domestic equipment, family heirlooms, buffaloes and, in recent years, a defined portion of government-recognized Toda land. All these assets are divided among sons when the household head dies, or, in the case of buffaloes, when he apportions his animals among his sons once he has retired from active herding. Daughters receive nothing of the family inheritance apart from a small dowry, usually in the form of jewelry. In the past the Toda household frequently comprised a set of brothers and their joint wife, with the brothers usually taking turns to accept paternity of the woman's offspring. Such polyandrous institutions, which have made this people so well-known in the annals of ethnography, no longer operate in Toda society.

Apart from these patrilineally-ascribed social groups, every Toda male and female is also a member of an exogamous matrilineal clan, known as a *poly-olkh*. Torthash has five such matrilineal clans and Töwfilly six. The matrilineal clans are descent categories – of ritual and sexual significance – rather than social groups *per se*. They lack

corporate unity and are minimally related to the Toda buffalo complex.

It may also be noted that Toda society functions without formal headmen at any level, except that of the household. Nevertheless, the community possesses well-defined procedures for ensuring that its members observe community norms, as well as for settling disputes between individuals or factions, and for deciding on united action by the entire Toda community. Whenever it is necessary for the community to take collective action, the adult males convene a *noym* 'caste council'. In the subsequent discussions, the unofficial but clearly recognized community leaders have a decisive role to play. These men – always in late-middle to old-age, sometimes wealthy and, increasingly, with some education – listen quietly while others shout, then slowly begin to take control of the assembly, directing it to an eventual consensus that embraces compromise and, in dispute, reconciliation. Similar assemblies, also called *noym*, may be held within sub-caste, patriclan, or hamlet, depending on the nature of the affair to be discussed.

#### TODA PASTORALISM

Anthropologists and others concerned with pastoral societies and cultures have stressed the need to reserve the term 'pastoral' for groups whose physical and cultural survival is strongly linked to the acquisition, maintenance, and control of domesticated animals. Only these people, it is argued, should be considered 'true pastoralists'. Others who maintain herds or flocks of domesticated animals mainly for prestige purposes and/ or to supplement their diet (the ingredients for which are procured principally through other economic strategies), are certainly animal husbandry men, but not true pastoralists. If we accept this argument, the only true pastoralists of the Nilgiri Mountains are the Todas or, more accurately, *were* the Todas, because many of them now own no livestock.



FIGURE 8. Toda buffaloes grazing on dried out pasture on the Wenlock Downs. Photograph: ©The author.

Cultural ecologists identify two major forms of pastoralism: nomadism and transhumance. Nomadic pastoralists lack permanent settlements. They move their homes, along with their herds, from pasture to pasture. In contrast, transhumant pastoralists typically have permanent settlements from where some of the herdsmen – usually not all – move to temporary homes at specific times during the year, as seasonal pastures become available. Such seasonal migrations may be 'vertical' with the herds rotated between lower and higher elevations, or 'horizontal' with the animals moved from one pasture to another to take advantage of micro-climatic differences unassociated with elevation.



FIGURE 9. Driving buffaloes to dry-season pastures. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.



There are no nomadic pastoralists in the Nilgiri Mountains, nor evidence that there ever have been. The Todas, along with some Kotas and Badagas, traditionally practiced horizontal transhumance. It is common for pastures to become seriously degraded during the dry months between December and March, when the Nilgiri toplands experience low precipitation coupled with cloudless and sharply sunny days, followed by frosty nights. Toda herdsmen consequently followed a regimen of horizontal transhumance, moving livestock to special 'dry season' pastures located in the western catchment area of the mountains, where the high-rainfall, grasslands provided excellent fodder at that time of the year. The Toda husbands, wives, children, and dairymen resided in hamlets here that had the same domestic residences, buffalo pens, calf-sheds, and dairy-temples as the settlements they had left behind.<sup>24</sup>



FIGURE 10. Kwehrshy, a dry-season hamlet belonging to Möhdr patriclan. Photograph: ©Tarun Chhabra.

As the southwest monsoon begins to break in early June, the exposed western escarpments of the mountains are beset with cold winds and rain, making the seasonal settlements and surrounding

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<sup>24</sup> Todas call these settlements *pyoolvehn mod*, 'sunny-season hamlets'.

grasslands largely intolerable for herdsmen and livestock alike, thus requiring a return to permanent homes to the east.

The Todas were true pastoralists in that their entire tradition – economic, social, and ritual – has traditionally focused on the ownership and care of a single species of animal, the Toda breed of the Indian river buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*). It is only during the last forty or fifty years that significant numbers of Todas have accepted the possibility of a livelihood not based on buffaloes.<sup>25</sup> This has transpired due to externally-generated, socio-economic pressure from the politico-administrative establishment – especially since India's freedom from British rule – that seems to have limited comprehension of the value of the pastoral alternative.

The relationship of the Todas to their buffaloes transcends mundane considerations of ownership and economic worth. They regard the buffalo as a special gift from the gods, particularly, according to modern Todas, from the preeminent deity, Goddess Tökishy. In Toda legends, buffaloes frequently talk and assume other anthropomorphic characteristics. One story has a buffalo and a man putting foreheads together and mourning in the manner Todas still observe at their funerals,<sup>26</sup> while another tells how a buffalo once established a particularly sacred dairy-temple. Even today, Todas credit their buffaloes with almost human intelligence.

Toda males' intense interest in buffaloes develops early in life. Small boys mold mud into buffalo images; construct model pens and dairies of sticks, stones, and mud; and spend hours at home in the hamlet or out on the grasslands absorbed in 'playing buffalo herding'. Another favorite pastime is fashioning buffalo horns, which often extends into adulthood. Toda men frequently pick up a forked twig or an old piece of wire and, more or less unconsciously, begin shaping it into the shape of a pair of buffalo horns.

'Buffalo' for the Todas, is virtually synonymous with 'cow buffalo'; the word employed generically for 'buffaloes', *ir*, actually means 'adult female buffalo'. This usage signifies the singular importance of the adult females as the source of milk and its products. As the Todas are vegetarians, male buffaloes have no value

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<sup>25</sup> See Walker (2012a).

<sup>26</sup> See Walker (1986:223-24) for further details.



to them except for breeding. Approximately one stud bull per three hamlets is retained for breeding purposes. Other male calves are sold to Nilgiri butchers after a year or so. In times past, a Toda gave his official Kota partner one male calf annually; also, a few male calves were once sacrificed and their meat consumed in a ritual meal, a custom apparently now abandoned.

As is common among pastoralists, the Todas have an extensive buffalo vocabulary identifying individual buffaloes by stages of growth, physical peculiarities, capacity for milk-giving, calf bearing, and so on.<sup>27</sup> The most important distinction that Todas make among female buffaloes is between the animals particularly associated with the sacred dairy-temples (generically termed *post-ir*, but with specific names according to their position in the ritual hierarchy) and the majority, called *pity-ir*, that are herded principally for domestic purposes.

The temple buffaloes are ranked according to the grade of the dairy-temple with which they are principally associated, with Toda concepts of ritual purity and pollution of vital importance in ranking both dairies and animals. In brief, the higher a buffalo's grade, the greater the care that must be taken to prevent its ritual defilement. Women may not milk a buffalo of any grade and laymen may only milk non-temple animals. Milk from temple buffaloes must be drawn by a dairyman-priest of appropriately high ritual status and purity, or else left for its calves to consume.

Finally, each adult female buffalo has its own name, ritually bestowed on the animal when it has calved for the first time, or else when it has been determined that it is barren. I witnessed on several occasions how Toda buffaloes respond to their names.

Todas know the pedigree of each one of the buffaloes they own, which runs exclusively in the female line. A female calf belongs to the same grade as its mother; the identity of its sire is irrelevant to the Todas. The bull may not even be a Toda buffalo; hence the possibility of crossbreeding, as has been done with Murrah buffalo bulls from North India, without affecting the ritual situation of the stock. Male buffaloes (in Toda, *er*) figure minimally, both in the

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<sup>27</sup> See Walker (1986:104) for details.

economics of Toda pastoralism and its ritual dimension. Indicative of their lesser value in Toda eyes, male beasts – even the finest stud bull – are never named.



FIGURE 11. Thoroughbred Toda buffaloes graze on the Wenlock Downs. The relatively fair hair and characteristic upward-curving horns are evident in this photograph. Photograph: ©The author.

#### THE TODAS' MOUNTAIN BUFFALOES

The breed of buffaloes that Todas (and some Kotas and Badagas)<sup>28</sup> herd are far removed from the dark-skinned, slow-moving, docile beasts commonly seen on the surrounding plains of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. Classified as a distinctive South Indian breed of *Bubalus bubalis*,<sup>29</sup> the Toda buffalo has a stockier build, lighter skin color, and more hair (an adaptation to the cool mountain environment) than lowland breeds. It has relatively short, sturdy legs, a broad chest, and a large and heavy head, characteristically carried low, from which the horns usually curve upwards to form two impressive semicircles. It is finely adapted to the Nilgiri Mountains, moving with ease across the undulating downs, thriving on their coarse grasses and tolerating, without shelter, the cold rain and hail of the southwest monsoon and the heavy ground frosts of its northeast counterpart.

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<sup>28</sup> See Noble (1977) and Hockings (2012c) for Badaga herding of Toda buffaloes and associated ritual; see Wolf (2012) for Kota buffalo herding and occasional sacrifice at funeral ceremonies.

<sup>29</sup> Gunn (1909:50).

The Toda buffalo has long been admired and feared by visitors to the Nilgiris, due to its robust build, swiftness on hoof, and ferocity. These animals are completely at ease in the company of their owners – even small Toda boys confidently mingle with the herds that belong to their fathers – but if a stranger approaches, their typical reaction is to abruptly throw up their heads, speedily retreat some distance, halt, turn, and stare at the interloper. The wise man now beats a hasty retreat, especially if he sees calves among the herd, lest their agitated mothers, heads lowered, mount a mass charge with the intent of trampling and goring to death the object of their fears.

The Toda buffalo's proverbial ferocity and ability to use its horns to maximum advantage is evident when a prowling tiger attacks. A single buffalo may prove no match for the great cat, but if the animals are grazing in a herd, they form themselves into a circle as soon as they sense a tiger's presence, tails to the center and horns at the perimeter, so that, wherever the predator strikes, it is met by a great pair of sharply-pointed horns.<sup>30</sup>

Some Toda buffalo are now feral, due to the community's gradual abandonment, completed in the early 1950s, of the dairies known as *tee* and their sacred buffaloes, the *tee-ir*. These feral *tee* herds are ferocious to the point that they have been known to kill encroaching humans. The danger they pose is further enhanced by the presence among them (in contrast to the domestic herds) of many bull buffaloes.

#### THE CARE AND OWNERSHIP OF BUFFALOES

Toda men and boys traditionally took exclusive care of buffaloes, in recognition of human males' superior ritual purity.<sup>31</sup> Processing buffalo milk is also an exclusively male task. In general, younger men

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<sup>30</sup> I mention Toda buffaloes protecting themselves against tiger attack in Walker (2012b), where there is a reference to Power (1954), an article concerning buffalo (not Toda) response to leopard attack. I was not consulted on this editorial insertion.

<sup>31</sup> In recent times, females occasionally assist males in steadying animals prior to milking, but even this limited contact seems rare.

and boys are responsible for the ordinary, non-temple-based dairy activities, though elders may participate if they wish. Specially-appointed and ordained dairymen-priests are responsible for temple animals.

In the past, rhythms of pastoral life<sup>32</sup> shaped the daily routine in every Toda hamlet. Buffaloes were milked morning and evening, but ranged freely over their grazing grounds most of the day, often untended. Once the milk had been churned and the butter clarified to make ghee, a Toda pastoralist was at leisure. His family's requirements other than buffalo milk and its products were mostly supplied by Kota, Badaga, and Kurumba neighbors in the complex set of trading-cum-ritual relationships alluded to earlier, typifying *jajmani*-type systems throughout India.<sup>33</sup>

The situation is much changed today. Grazing buffaloes need to be watched lest they stray into cultivated fields and forest plantations; and grain, pots, implements, and forest materials do not come from neighbors in exchange for dairy products but must be purchased in markets for cash. In general, Toda households keep far fewer buffaloes than in years past and usually sell raw whatever spare milk they have from their domestic animals, rather than processing it. As already mentioned, many households now own no livestock.

Beyond the routine care of the buffaloes, milking, pasturing, penning, and tending to the young calves, there are certain occasional events, essentially utilitarian in nature, but enveloped also in ritual activity, that dairymen-priests (rather than ordinary herdsman) must supervise. These include giving salt to buffaloes, migrating with them to new pastures, and burning off old grass to permit regrowth.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Walker (1986:108-14) for specifics.

<sup>33</sup> See Mandelbaum (1970:159-80) for an explication of *jajmani* relationships.

<sup>34</sup> See Rivers (1906:123-43, 166-81) and Walker (1986:158-83) for ritual details.



FIGURE 12. A circular buffalo pen cut into the hillside on one side with a rough wooden fence on the other. Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 13. Driving buffaloes to salt pits. Photograph: ©The author.





FIGURE 14. A dairyman-priest clad in priestly black loincloth called *tiny* adds salt to a pit filled with water from the dairy stream. As a buffalo drinks, the remainder of the herd is being driven to the pit. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.



FIGURE 15. A Toda lad's pride and joy. Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 16. Calves resting in the sunshine in front of the *polly* at Melgaash patriclan's chief hamlet located just above the botanical gardens in Ootacamund. Behind the dairy-temple is an extensive area of gazetted Toda lands (*patta*) that have been terraced for potato and cabbage cultivation. Some of the lands are worked by Todas themselves, but many have been leased to outsiders. Photograph: ©The author.

A buffalo herd was generally held in common by brothers when fraternal polyandry was the norm among Todas. They divided the herd only if they quarreled among themselves. Today, brothers may still sometimes share a herd, but mostly the domestic (and some temple) animals belong to individual men, the heads of their respective households. Buffaloes rather frequently change hands as animals are given as gifts, in compensation for taking another man's wife, and in payment of fines. Great numbers of buffaloes were sacrificed at funerals in former times. By the 1960s the number of sacrificial beasts had been reduced to two, or even one; today, one or even none seems more usual.

Todas have traditionally obtained milk, buttermilk, and ghee from their domestic herds. But for almost a century now, increasing numbers of Toda households have derived cash income from the sale of raw milk, ghee, and, occasionally, a buffalo or calf. Buffalo dung



may also be sold as fertilizer, and has been an increasingly valuable commodity since the 1970s.



FIGURE 17. Layman milking domestic buffalo at Kaash Hamlet, popularly known outside the Toda community as 'Kandalmund' and located within the municipal limits of Ootacamund. Photograph: ©PK Nambiar.

In 1978 I estimated that an average Toda household, comprising husband, wife, and three to four children needed four to five milking buffaloes producing at least fifteen liters of milk per day (five liters for domestic use and ten liters for sale) if it intended to earn its livelihood solely from dairying. This required access to a herd of twelve to fifteen animals, including calves. During a livestock census that I conducted in 2000, I discovered that only nineteen (nine percent) of 202 households surveyed claimed to own a herd of twelve or more buffaloes.

The majority of Toda buffaloes are of domestic rather than temple grade. In the 2000 count, there were 713 secular, to 199



temple buffaloes in the 202 households surveyed. Thirty years earlier in 1970, the ratio was rather similar, seventy-one percent 'domestic' to twenty-nine percent 'temple' in a sample of twenty-eight households. Toda who own just a few buffaloes prefer not to have temple animals in their herd, since they cannot benefit economically from the sale of their milk, which is too sacred to be transferred to outsiders. If a man has ten to fifteen temple buffaloes, he may be in a position to operate a dairy-temple, either by employing a dairyman-priest or by becoming one himself if he is ritually qualified to do so. Ghee from the temple herd (the making of which, as noted earlier, removes the sanctity of the milk) may then be sold for profit. But in the year 2000, only five (2.5 percent) of the 202 surveyed households claimed to own ten or more temple animals. Clearly this is not a viable option for most contemporary Todas.

Early nineteenth century reports that the Toda community possessed great herds of buffaloes were probably much exaggerated. James Hough(1829:75) suggested the community, which he counted as numbering 326persons, owned as many as 10,000 animals in 1825. The first actual count of the Toda herds, in 1847 (Ouchterlony 1848:90-94), put the number of Toda buffaloes as 6,498 for a population he counted as numbering 917. A typical buffalo-to-person ratio through the first three-quarters of the twentieth century (the demographics of the Toda community were by then much more reliable) was approximately three to one; by 1988 this had dropped to only 1.3 buffaloes per person and in2000, to just under one (0.99).

Between 1930 and 1975, the overall number of buffaloes owned by the Toda community showed a slow but steady rise in tandem with an increase in the Toda population itself. In 1930, there were 1,619 buffaloes for 597 people; in 1960 there were 2,186 buffaloes for 612 people; and in 1975, there were 2,650 buffaloes for 948 people. Thereafter, while the Toda population continued increasing, their buffalo herds began shrinking dramatically. Between 1975 and 1988, the Toda population (excluding Christians) rose by seventy-nine, the buffalo population fell by 1,317, or by about fifty percent. The decline continues, although less rapidly. By 2000, I inferred from my count of seventy-seven percent of all Toda hamlets that the herds had lost another 133 head.

The decline is due to the State and National governments having commandeered large areas of traditional Toda pasture for reforestation and hydroelectricity production; added to this, the Todas themselves have found it profitable to break up what lands remain to them for crop production.<sup>35</sup> Until recently, renters from other communities have been responsible for most of the farm work; slowly, however, more and more Todas – bereft of their buffaloes – have taken up hoes and digging forks. It no longer seems far-fetched to foresee a time when no 'true pastoralists' will remain on the Nilgiri Mountains.

#### TEMPLES AND TEMPLE BUFFALOES

Simply stated, the Todas categorize their buffalo herds into domestic and temple grades. The reality, however, is not so straightforward. This is because (a) there exists an elaborate gradation of the temple animals, generically termed *post-ir*, and (b) a degree of sanctity adheres to all *female* buffaloes, but none to males, whether born of a secular or temple dam. It is for the latter reason that I prefer the terms 'domestic' and 'temple' over the more common 'sacred' and 'non-sacred' buffaloes.

Domestic buffaloes (generically, *pity-ir*) and lower-grade temple buffaloes may be owned by individual men, by brothers, or by brothers and their sons, while the higher grades of temple buffaloes are always the common property of a patriclan. Responsibility for their care, in this society without individual political office, lies with the collectivity of clan elders.

Traditional Toda ritual activities that survive despite the recent decline of pastoralism in favor of agriculture<sup>36</sup> revolve mainly around the community's sacred dairies. The more important sacred dairies are imbued with divinity as *töw-nor*, the 'gods of the places' or, more accurately, 'the places that are gods'. Sacred dairies are the Todas' temples that they identify as such when speaking in Tamil or English. Specially consecrated and ritually pure dairymen (the

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<sup>35</sup> Walker (2012a).

<sup>36</sup> Walker (2012a).

community's priests) process buffaloes' milk in these sacred buildings.

Among the Toda, virtually every major activity connected with the dairy-temples and their associated buffalo herds receives the imprint of ritual: building or rebuilding a dairy, re-thatching its roof, consecrating a dairyman for it, introducing dairying equipment into the building, lighting the dairy lamp and fire, processing milk into butter and ghee, and distributing the byproduct, buttermilk, are all highly ritualized acts, as also are the milking of the temple buffaloes, the naming of all buffaloes, giving the animals salt water to drink on specified occasions, migrating with them to fresh pastures, burning off pastures to ensure new, succulent grass for them, offering them as gifts or fines, and sacrificing them at funerals.



FIGURE 18. Kaash, the chief hamlet of the patriclan of the same name. In the left background is the domestic area with, at the present time, entirely non-traditional architecture. To the right foreground is the hamlet's *wis-oly-grade* dairy temple and in the right middle ground is the lower-ranking *kur-polly*. (These dairies are misidentified in my 1986 book on the Todas [Walker 1986: Pl. 14a, facing p. 124]). Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 19. The newly-renovated (year 2000) *tor-folly*-grade dairy at Nawsh Clan's Teshtery Hamlet. Photograph: ©The author.



FIGURE 20. The dairy-temple of Pekhor Hamlet (Mortkör patriclan, Töwfilly sub-caste), with fine Toda buffaloes in front. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.



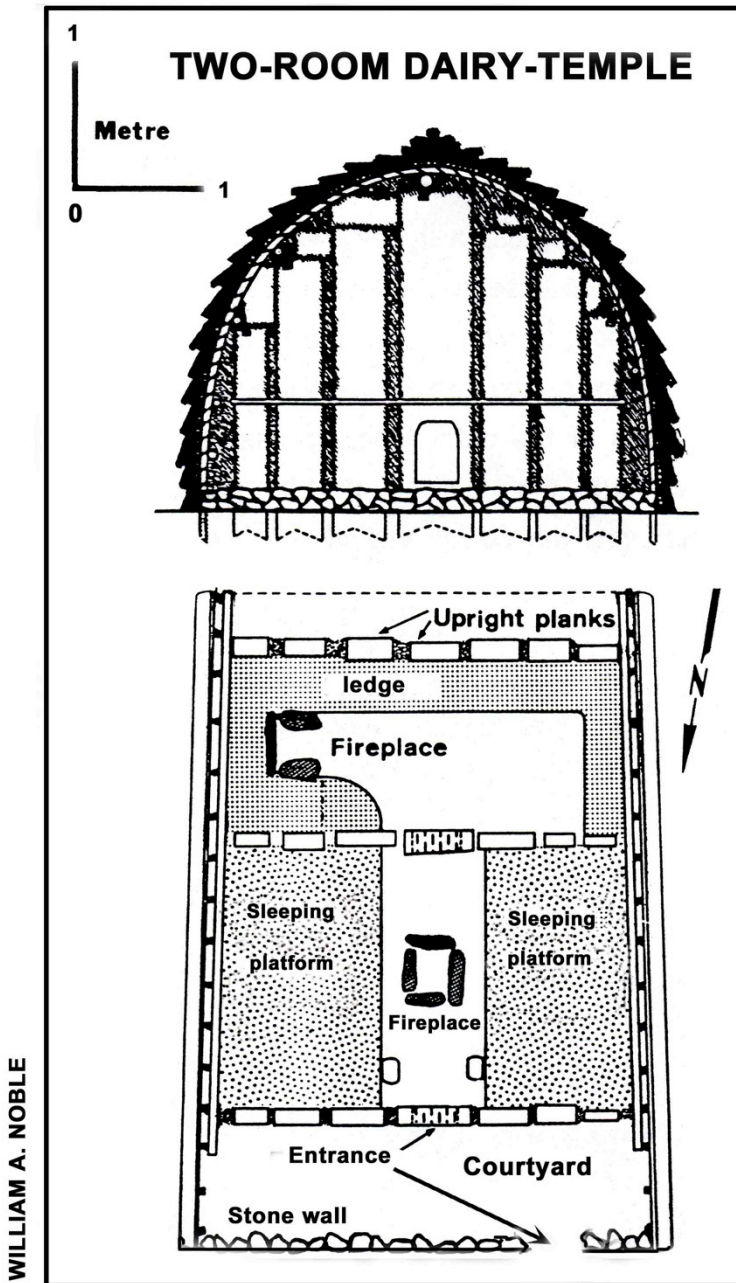


FIGURE 21. Plan of the front and interior of a two-roomed dairy temple.  
Courtesy, William A. Noble.



FIGURE 22. Dairyman-priest applying sacred butter processed in the dairy-temple onto the wall above the entrance of Konawsh foh, one of two extant Toda conical dairy-temples. Photograph: ©Tarun Chhabra.

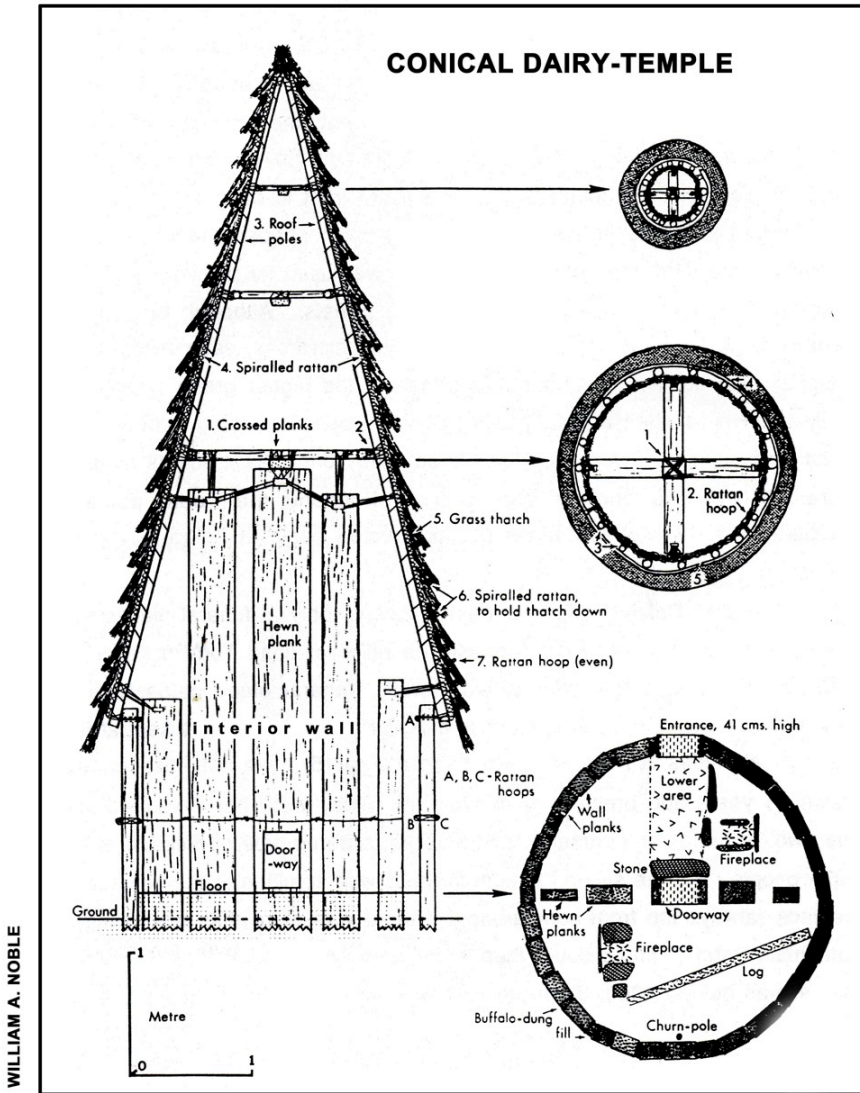


FIGURE 23. Plan of the front and interior of a long-defunct conical dairy at one of the *tee* dairy complexes. Courtesy, William A Noble.





FIGURE 24. Kithdu, the disabled dairyman-priest of the Melgaash patriclan sitting outside his dairy-temple at his clan's chief hamlet above Ootacamund's Botanical Gardens. He wears secular attire during a break from his ritual duties. Whereas most boys and men serve at a dairy-temple for only a few weeks or months at a time, Kithdu, whose disability precluded his functioning as a herdsman, was a more or less full-time *polly-kartpolkh* for more than 30 years. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.





FIGURE 25. Dairyman-priest in black loincloth (*tūny*) at Nūln seasonal hamlet milking a sacred temple buffalo in his charge at a newly-opened seasonal hamlet. The horns and skin color of the temple buffalo indicate that it is a cross-breed, probably with Murrah buffalo genes, rather than a thoroughbred Toda animal. Photograph: ©Tarun Chhabra.



FIGURE 26. Re-thatching a dairy-temple at Inkitty hamlet, 1974. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.



FIGURE 27. Toda women dancing to mark the successful conclusion of a dairy-temple re-thatching at Inkitty hamlet, 1974. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.



Dairy temples, their furnishings, and equipment, must be maintained at a high level of ritual purity, as must the lives of the dairymen themselves. The higher the grade of a dairy, the greater its sanctity and, consequently, the more stringent the rules for maintaining the purity of every person and thing associated with it. Ritual purity is achieved through rigid avoidance of physical contact with persons, especially sexually mature females, and objects of the inherently impure secular world of domestic life: birth, menstruation, copulation, and death. People and objects from outside the Toda community are also avoided.



FIGURE 28. Young dairy-man priest at Nūln seasonal hamlet standing at the dairy entrance holds a cane churning stick and bamboo milking vessel. The fern is said to protect the ritual purity of these sacred artifacts while they are outside of the dairy. Photograph: ©Tarun Chhabra.

Most Toda dairy-temples are half-barrel-shaped. There are only two remaining conical – and particularly sacred – dairies, termed *poh*. The majority of dairies have a front and a rear room. The front room has a raised earthen platform on each side; these are the sleeping and resting places for the dairyman and, if he has one, his

assistant. Between the two platforms is an earthen hearth, not for cooking but merely for warmth. Certain appurtenances not associated with the dairy ritual are kept in this front room: a bamboo water vessel for the dairyman's ablutions, an axe for chopping firewood, the firewood itself, a woven cane basket for carrying rice or other food grains into the dairy, and the dairyman's secular clothing.

The inner room is the ritual heart of the temple. The sacred dairy equipment is stored in this room and the dairyman also performs the most important duty of his office here: the churning of milk into butter and buttermilk. There are two principal areas within this most sacred inner room, corresponding to the two categories of dairy equipment. There is a raised earthen shelf on the right hand side as one enters the room, on which is kept the less-sacred of the dairy equipment, the *er-tat-far*: earthenware and bamboo vessels used to store and carry away the products of the dairy; vessels that the dairyman uses to cook his own food on a second hearth, to the left in this inner room; the firesticks he employs to produce fire by friction because matches and lighters may not be used inside a dairy-temple; and the dairy lamp.

Certain of these items come into contact with the impure world outside the dairy and therefore the whole category is considered to be of inferior sanctity compared to the objects (termed *po-tat-far*) that are kept on a second earthen shelf, against the back wall of the dairy.

Among the *po-tat-far* are the vessels used for milking, for storing the milk, and for churning. The total separation of this most sacred – and therefore most pure – category of dairy equipment from the impure outside world necessitates that the butter and buttermilk be transferred to vessels of the less-sacred grade before they are moved from the dairy.

Some dairy-temples also possess ritual artifacts of the very highest sanctity. These are metal objects (iron, silver, and gold are reported) that are attached to the rear wall of the dairy's inner room and are covered with ferns to protect their purity. Generically they are termed *monny*, meaning 'bell', though I was informed that most of them are not actually bells. Certain evidence nonetheless suggests

that the prototypical *monny* were indeed bells that were hung around the necks of especially sacred or important buffaloes.

Finally, among the most sacred of the dairy appurtenances is another earthen vessel that is not kept inside the building at all, but is buried in the ground some distance away. The purity of the entire dairy-temple is linked to the condition of this pot, called *muu*. If the building is defiled by contact with impure persons or objects, the *muu* must be excavated and a series of complex purification rites performed.<sup>37</sup>



FIGURE 29 Making obeisance to the dairy-temple entrance during a temple-purification rite. Photograph: Pauline Hetland Walker, ©The author.

The dairy's daily routine begins soon after dawn, when the dairyman leaves the outer room where he has spent the night, and salutes the rising sun, first removing his cloak from his right shoulder – symbolizing respect – and then raising his outstretched right hand to his forehead, while simultaneously uttering the single word *sawn* (from *swamy*, 'Lord', 'God', 'Divinity'). He releases the buffaloes from the hamlet pen (temple and domestic animals are penned together),

<sup>37</sup> See Walker (1986:165-66) for details.

re-enters the dairy-temple to churn, according to prescribed rules, the milk he drew from the animals the previous evening; stores the butter and buttermilk; and then goes out again to milk the animals in his charge. Laymen milk the remaining domestic buffaloes. Finally, the dairyman passes the buttermilk vessel to a layman who, in turn, brings it to a prescribed spot usually marked by a stone or stones that is the boundary between the sacred and secular areas of the hamlet. Women may assemble here to receive the buttermilk; on no condition, however, may they pass into the sacred area.

The dairy procedures of the late afternoon to early evening are more highly ritualized than those of the morning. The dairyman bows down at the entrance of his dairy, touching his forehead to the threshold, before entering the outer room. He then bows likewise at the threshold of the sacred inner room, enters, and first touches a vessel of the less-sacred *er-tat* grade of dairy equipment and then one of the more-sacred *po-tat* vessels. He fans up the fire or, if necessary, rekindles it with fire produced with special firesticks, thus replicating the ancient manner in which Todas produced fire. He lights the lamp and salutes it as he had the rising sun in the morning; but now, in place of the single utterance, "*sawn*," he recites a formal invocatory prayer beginning with a recitation of the sacred names or *kwasham* in couplets of the hamlet, dairy, buffaloes, cattle pens and nearby natural features – hills, swamps, streams, etc. – and concludes with a series of requests for boons, as for example:<sup>38</sup>

"May that which gives milk, give milk! May that which grows, grow!"

"May the barren women bear children! May the barren buffaloes bear calves!"

"May the god of the dairy subdue disease! May the god of the dairy subdue illness!"

"May the god give us living children! May the god give us living calves!"

"May the god subdue the messenger of death! May the god subdue the Tamilians!"

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<sup>38</sup> See Emeneau (1974:16).

The lamp lit and prayer recited, the dairyman proceeds to churn the morning's milk. He stores the butter and buttermilk in their appropriate vessels, after which he sets off to milk the temple buffaloes once more. This task done, he pens the animals for the night and, facing the entrance of the pen, salutes it, while repeating the dairy prayer he uttered when lighting the temple lamp. His ritual activities are at an end. He now prepares and eats his evening meal, after which he may sleep.

The principal objectives of the Toda sacred dairy operations are for the dairyman-priest, a man or youth of greater ritual purity than ordinary males, to milk the temple buffaloes in his charge, and to process their milk inside the dairy-temple, producing butter, buttermilk, and ghee. The milk drawn for a dairy is sacred, whatever the grade of buffalo from which it is derived. On the other hand, buttermilk and butter have much less sanctity, and ghee has none. It is thus possible to interpret the entire dairy ritual, though this is not an indigenous exegesis, as a procedure for diluting the extreme sanctity of the milk in order that its final product, ghee, may be consumed by and traded with anybody.

#### THE DAIRY HIERARCHY

The foregoing description of the dairy and of the daily routine associated with it applies to all Toda dairies, but there are many additions and refinements that need to be adumbrated for the reader to grasp the complexity of the ritual dimension of Toda dairying.

Dairies and buffalo herds are graded into a complex hierarchy according to relative sanctity; the higher their position in that hierarchy, the more elaborate is the ritual associated with the daily tasks of the dairyman and the more stringent the precautions for maintaining the purity of the dairy, its appurtenances, and its incumbent dairyman. More elaborate also are the rites required to purify a *per-olkh* 'layman' to the level of ritual purity required for him to operate the dairy.

The dairy hierarchy (see following table), in practice, pertains almost entirely to dairies belonging to members of Torthash sub-

caste, since all those owned by Töwfilly clans are of the same, lowly grade.

At the zenith of the dairy hierarchy are the institutions known as *tee*, the name deriving ultimately from Sanskrit *sri*, "holiness, sacredness."<sup>39</sup> Five Torthash patriclans traditionally owned dairy complexes of this most sacred category, all but one of which comprised two or more settlements, or *tee mod*. These sacred settlements were often located far apart, the buffaloes being driven from one to another *tee mod* of the same complex at stipulated times and over prescribed paths. Moreover, each *tee* settlement had either one or two dairies, along with such subsidiary buildings as huts for the dairymen and calf-sheds and pens for the animals, a sacred and a non-sacred water source (for the dairyman and his assistant respectively), and surrounding pastures. The associated buffalo herds included both highly sacred grades (collectively, *pen-ir*), as well as others (*piny-ir*), whose level of sanctity corresponded to that of the ordinary domestic beasts of the larger community. In fact, the *tee* complexes were not just another, higher, grade of Toda dairy; they were microcosms of the wider Toda dairy cult, *in both its sacred and secular dimensions* and maintained at the highest possible level of purity.

Here, I omit the details of the *tee* dairy complexes and confine myself to those grades of dairy that still function, albeit some of them only very sporadically. I treat each grade of dairy separately, but present a relatively comprehensive account only of the low-grade Töwfilly dairies (*polly*). Subsequent descriptions of the several higher grades of Torthash dairy-temples will simply refer back to the data provided for the Töwfilly *polly*.

Notwithstanding omissions and adumbrations, the quantity and intricacy of the ritual details may still seem incredible, but it must be noted that these details are vital to the Todas, or at least were to those who led the community at the time of my fieldwork in the 1960s and '70s.

It must also be emphasized that, although almost every grade of dairy-temple has a particular grade of buffalo associated with it, buffaloes of a lower grade may also be milked at any Toda dairy

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<sup>39</sup> Emeneau (1953:106-108; 1971:xlili, n.21).



except – when they still functioned – at the very highest: the *tee* which, as we have observed, had their own equivalent to the domestic animals of the community at large. Moreover, the milk of the lower-grade buffaloes may be churned together with that of the dairy's higher-grade animals without polluting it. This suggests that it is the dairy that sacralizes the milk drawn for it, rather than milk being sanctified by its source, the buffalo. This consideration has been overlooked by most ethnographers of Toda society, but it means that discussion of the ritual dimension of Toda pastoralism must give precedence to the dairies as the prime source of sanctity, rather than, as has usually been done, to the buffaloes.

Conversely, female buffaloes obviously possess sanctity in their own right, and even domestic animals may be seen as constituting the lowest grade in the hierarchy, rather than being a totally different category of buffalo. The sanctity of the buffaloes in their own right is evident in the fact that higher-grade animals may not be milked at lower-grade dairies, because this defiles them.

FIGURE 30. The Hierarchy of Dairies and Buffaloes (graded from one to eight, low to high).<sup>40</sup>

Dairy Name	Grade	Associated Herd	Grade	Dairyman	Qualifications
Torthash <i>tor-folly</i>	1	<i>noshpep-ir</i> (6 patriclans) <i>penep-ir</i> (3 patriclans)	1	<i>tor-folly</i> <i>kartpolkh/</i> <i>mox</i>	any Torthash male
Melgaash <i>polly</i>	2	<i>peshosh-ir</i>	1	<i>polly</i> <i>kartpolkh/</i> <i>mox</i>	males of Melgaash patriclan only
Töwfilly <i>polly</i>	2	<i>post-ir</i>	1	<i>polly</i> <i>kartpolkh/</i> <i>mokh</i>	any Töwfilly male

<sup>40</sup> A simplified transcription of Toda names is given in this table; for linguistically accurate renditions, see Walker (1986:129).

<i>kur-polly</i>	3	<i>mort-ir</i> (Kaash Clan) <i>noshpep-ir</i> (Mör Clan)	2 2	<i>kur-polly</i> <i>kartpolkh/</i> <i>mox</i>	any Torthash male, or a Töwfilly man under certain circumstances
<i>wish-olly</i>	4	<i>wish-olly-ir</i>	3	<i>wish-olkh</i>	any Töwfilly male or a Torthash man of Melgaash Clan
Konawsh <i>foh</i> <sup>41</sup>	5	<i>noshpep-ir</i>	1	<i>poh</i> <i>kartpolkh</i>	mature males of Kerrir Clan only
<i>kog-folly</i>	6	<i>kog-folly-ir</i>	4	<i>kog-folly</i> <i>kartpolkh/</i> <i>mokh</i>	males of Tawrradr Clan only
<i>tee poh</i> (lower grade)	7	<i>peshn-ir</i> , (lower grade) <i>piny-ir</i>	5 1	<i>pol-olkh</i>  and	A Töwfilly male (some restrictions)
<i>tee poh</i> (higher grade)	8	<i>peshn-ir</i> , (higher grade) <i>piny-ir</i>	6 1	assistant (called <i>kolt-mokh</i> )	a Töwfilly youth or a Torthash youth of Melgaash Clan

Töwfilly Sub-caste's *Polly*

The patrilans of the Töwfilly sub-caste have no hierarchy of grades among their dairies and temple buffaloes. All Töwfilly dairies are of the same grade and all are designated by the generic term for a dairy, *polly*. Associated with these *polly* are buffaloes called *post-ir*, the single grade of temple buffalo traditionally owned by this sub-caste. But, as at all Toda dairies other than the very highest, lower-grade animals may also be milked by the officiating dairyman and their

<sup>41</sup> All Todas regard the conical *poh* dairy at Konawsh as possessing particular sanctity, but may not necessarily ascribe it the ranking given in this table.

milk churned together with that from the buffaloes particularly associated with the grade of dairy concerned. The only buffaloes ranked below *post-ir* are the ordinary domestic animals, called *pity-ir*. In the case of the Töwfilly *polly*, therefore, domestic *pity-ir* as well as *post-ir* may be milked by the dairyman-priest.

Töwfilly *polly*, without a hierarchy of grade, are nonetheless distinguished by their measure of sanctity. Thus, a number of Töwfilly hamlets traditionally have had two dairies, terminologically distinguished as *kog-folly* 'big dairy' and *kid-folly* 'small dairy'.<sup>42</sup> Though of identical grade, served by dairymen of the same ritual status, and associated with the same grade of buffalo, the *kog-folly* are more sacred than the *kid-folly* because of their current or former possession of a sacred *monny*. This, in turn, requires the performance of the special rite of 'feeding the *monny*', which the dairyman must perform before churning the milk each morning, anointing the *monny* three times with some of the broken-up curd from his churning pot, and each time uttering the sacred syllable, "awn" (seemingly cognate with the Sanskrit *om*). If a *kog-folly's* *monny* has been lost, the dairyman anoints the dairy wall where it would have been hung.

The Töwfilly dairies are operated by dairymen-priests called *polly-kartpolkh*, 'men (*olkh*) who milk at the *polly*', or, if young, *polly-kartmokh* 'boys (*mokh*) who milk at the *polly*'. The dairyman or dairy boy is from about twelve years of age upwards, which is the age at which he is capable of learning and remembering the dairy prayers and rituals. He is usually a member of the patriclan that owns the dairy, otherwise, he may be a member of the same sub-caste. A member of Torthash sub-caste may not serve at a Töwfilly dairy.

Just like every other Toda dairy office, that of *polly-kartpolkh* or *polly-kartmokh* is not a life-long appointment. All Toda males are expected to officiate at a dairy-temple at least once in their lifetime, according to their eligibility. Failure to undertake priestly office is considered a ritual omission, like failing to marry – a man should not leave this world without having performed the duties of a husband, father, and dairyman. A man or youth may serve as dairyman for as

<sup>42</sup> In Toda, 'p' and 'f' are frequently interchangeable, but in this case, the temple is always pronounced '*kog-folly*', never '*kog-polly*'.

long or short a period as he wishes or for which he has contracted. When the dairyman serves in his own hamlet, he usually receives no payment, but if another hamlet seeks his services, he may be compensated in cash or kind – there are no specific rules about this.

Before a dairyman begins his priestly duties, he must undergo an ordination ceremony, the main purpose of which is to raise him to a level of ritual purity consonant with the sanctity of the dairy in which he is to serve. For a Töwfilly *polly* the induction process begins in the early morning when the dairyman-designate goes to the dairy without eating. Being alone or with a companion does not matter. However, there will probably be a knowledgeable bystander to direct the proceedings if he is inexperienced. He bows at the dairy threshold, washes his hands with water given to him by the outgoing dairyman or, if there is none, he washes at the dairy stream. He then changes his clothes in the outer room of the dairy. Leaving his ordinary white loincloth and embroidered cloak there, he dons a *tüny*, the dairyman's black loincloth provided by members of the hamlet in which the dairy is located; the candidate receives the *tüny* from the outgoing dairyman or brings it with him. Thus properly clad, he goes to the dairy stream where he collects seven *mülly-esh* (*mülly*, Yellow Bramble, *Rubus ellipticus*; *esh*, 'leaf') and a handful of young shoots of the same plant, which he pulps on a stone at the edge of the dairy stream. He takes some of the pulp, dips it into the stream, and squeezes out liquid three times onto one of the leaves. He raises this leaf to his forehead before drinking the infusion and then throws the leaf backwards over his head. He repeats the process with each of the remaining six leaves. The candidate then collects the used shoots, again dips them in water, rubs his face and body three times with them and, finally, puts the shoots into his hair at the back of his head.

The dairyman-designate has now achieved a state of ritual purity sufficient for him to begin the final rites of ordination. He returns to the dairy where the outgoing dairyman has placed a *muu* or earthen pot of *po-tat* grade and some strands of *kakarkh* grass (*Eragrostis nigra*) at the entrance. The candidate ritually sweeps the threshold of the dairy with the grass and bows to the *muu*. He repeats this sequence three times before entering the dairy. Proceeding directly to the threshold of the inner room, he bows and enters the

*sanctum sanctorum*. Inside, if the dairy is a *kog-folly*, he salutes the *monny* or, if it has been lost, the place where this sacred object used to hang, by raising his right hand vertically to his forehead. He bows before the *er-tat*-grade equipment and then the *po-tat*-grade utensils and finally touches an *er-tat* vessel and then the actual *po-tat* 'churning pot'. He establishes himself as a fully-qualified dairyman-priest with this last act. He rekindles the fire in the inner room, making it by friction if necessary, and goes out to milk the buffaloes for the dairy.

The overall intention of these rites is clear, while meanings of many details are obscure. The aim is to raise a man of the impure secular world to a state of ritual purity sufficient for him to enter the pure and sacred realm of the dairy, principally by requiring that he drink, as well as wash himself with water from a sacred source; and then to bring him, stage by stage, into contact with the sacred objects with which he will be associated during his period of priesthood. But why *mülly* leaves, and why seven? Why throw the leaves over his head and put shoots in his hair? Why the ritual sweeping at the dairy threshold? For the Todas themselves, these ritual details are of extreme importance and failure to adhere to them is thought to nullify the efficacy of the rite in question. But they care little, if at all, about exegesis.

Once a man has achieved, through ritual, a degree of purity sufficient for him to operate the *polly*, he must carefully order his daily life so as not to diminish that purity. He must not visit impure places, attend ceremonies that will contaminate him, or consume impure foods and drink. He also may not visit the Nilgiri bazaars, where he would have close contact with impure people and things. On the other hand, he is free to visit the domestic area of his own and the other Toda settlements, but not on the weekly *mod-nol* or sacred 'village day',<sup>43</sup> observed by the hamlet where his dairy is located. And, except on such days, the *polly kartpolkh* may sleep with a woman. However, whenever the dairyman enters a domestic dwelling, he must rigorously avoid touching any part of it but the floor and the sleeping platform. Contact with anything else in the house

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<sup>43</sup> See Walker (1986:158-9) for the significance of the day.

immediately reduces the dairyman's ritual status to that of *per-olkh* 'ordinary man'.

In terms of ceremonies, on no account may the *polly-kartpolkh* attend a funeral or rites associated with a woman's pregnancy and childbearing. He is free to attend other, less polluting, rituals, but will not eat the food served on such occasions. So far as his food and drink are concerned, he must cook his own meals in the inner room of the dairy and consume them in the outer room. He may eat only pure foods: milk, milk products, and his staple grain (now rice, formerly millet). Salt and *jiggery* 'crude sugar' are the only additives allowed in the inner room of the dairy, but he may keep chilies in the outer room and add them after he has brought his food to that less sacred part of the building. He must obtain all his water from the dairy stream; on no condition may he have any contact with the domestic water supply. He is strictly prohibited from using coffee, alcohol, opium, tobacco, or other stimulants.

A dairyman infringing on any of these rules immediately reverts to the status of *per-olkh* and may resume his priestly duties only after repeating the ordination rituals. Should he be polluted by attending a funeral, pregnancy, or childbirth ceremony, he incurs special pollution – just like any other Toda – which lasts until the next moon; only then does he regain sufficient ritual purity to enable him to repeat the ordination rites. It is by purposely infringing one of these rules – most commonly by touching the domestic water supply – that a man who so wishes terminates his period of services as dairyman-priest.

When the *polly-kartpolkh* is engaged in the ritual work of dairying, he wears his black loincloth (*tüny*) and, especially in the morning chill, may don a second black cloth as a shawl. He must also wear the traditional undergarment of the Toda male, the breechclout and waist-string; on no account may he enter the dairy wearing modern undershorts. At other times he wears ordinary Toda garments, leaving his priestly attire inside the dairy.

Torthash Sub-caste's *Tor-folly*

In the majority of hamlets of Torthash sub-caste, the lowest grade of dairy-temple is the *tor-folly* ('the dairy [*folly=polly*] of the Tor[thash] people'). The dairyman/ boy who serves a *tor-folly* is called a *tor-folly kartpolkh/ mokh*. He must belong to Torthash sub-caste and usually is a member of the clan that owns the dairy that he serves.

The rites of ordination, as also the rules of conduct for the officiating dairyman, are almost identical to those of the Töwfilly *polly*.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, however, *tor-folly* dairymen do not don a black loincloth when engaged in ritual activity, but instead wear a regular white loincloth. This, together with the fact that no *tor-folly* has or had a *monny*, suggests that Torthash's lowest-ranking dairy-temples are less sacred than their Töwfilly equivalents, the *polly*, as indicated in the table above.

The buffaloes associated with the *tor-folly* are the least sacred of the temple animals owned by the Torthash sub-caste. They are divided into two named categories of identical sanctity. Six Torthash patrilineal clans are traditional owners of buffaloes called *noshpep-ir*, while five others have animals called *penep-ir*. But because buffaloes, both domestic and temple, are frequently exchanged between clans as gifts and in payment of fines, most Torthash clans own temple buffaloes originating from other clans, in addition to the grades of animal proper to them. For example, a particular *tor-folly* dairy may have *noshpep-ir*, *penep-ir*, and *post-ir* from Melgaash and the Töwfilly patrilineal clans associated with it. But in a temple herd of mixed grade, the grade of buffalo traditionally associated with the owning patrilineal clan is regarded by that clan as most sacred and is believed to have originally been given to them by Goddess Tökishy. Moreover, only the grade of buffalo traditionally owned by the clan may be sacrificed at clansmen's funerals.

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<sup>44</sup> One may seldom write of 'identical' rites among Todas, due to the many small variations of custom from clan to clan, hamlet to hamlet, and even dairy to dairy. This cautions against too hastily criticizing other researchers' descriptions, which may reflect such ritual variation.

### Melgaash Clan's *Polly*

Melgaash patriclan, belonging to the Torthash sub-caste, shares many social and ritual features with the Töwfilly people.<sup>45</sup> Its anomalous status with respect to the community's social organization is also reflected in its dairy organization. Melgaash dairies are all of the same grade, are known as *polly*, and the dairymen who operate them are called *polly kartpolkh/ molk* – just like those of the Töwfilly patriclans. Only Melgaash clansmen may serve in Melgaash dairy – temples. They wear the black loincloth or *tüny* as do Töwfilly priests.

The single grade of temple buffalo owned by Melgaash patriclan corresponds in rank, Todas say, to the Töwfilly *post-ir* and to the *noshpep-ir* and *penep-ir* of the other Torthash patriclans. Melgaash's temple buffaloes have their own name, *peshoshir*.

### The *Kur-polly* of Some Torthash Clans

Two (previously three) Torthash patriclans traditionally own dairies higher in sanctity than the *tor-folly* described above. These dairies are called *kur-polly* (the etymology of *kur* is obscure). The man who operates a *kur-polly* is called a *kur-polly kartpolkh/ mokh* and is usually from Torthash sub-caste; a Töwfilly man may also perform this task should he also operate the *wisolly* dairy (see below) in a hamlet that has both grades of sacred dairy-temple. Ordination rites for a *kur-polly kartpolkh/ mokh* are identical to those for the man who is to operate a *tor-folly*.

Like Töwfilly's *kog-folly* vis-à-vis their *kid-folly*, Torthash's *kur-polly* dairies owe their higher sanctity vis-à-vis the sub-caste's *tor-folly* to the presence, or former presence, in these buildings of a sacred *monny*. But in contrast to the Töwfilly *polly*, where the possession of a *monny* raises the sanctity but not the grade of the dairy, the ownership by *kur-polly* of *monny* raises both sanctity and grade.

Because the *kur-polly* possess, or once possessed, *monny*, the incumbent dairyman-priest must perform the rite of 'feeding the

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<sup>45</sup> See Walker (1986:70, 70-71 n.13, 72, 134-35).



*monny'*, as described for a Töwfilly *kog-folly*. Special precautions must also be taken to preserve the purity of the *kur-polly's* churning pot, including, most importantly, the use of the bark from the Hill Mango tree (*Meliosma pungens*). Todas call this bark *tehr* and regard it as a particularly potent ritual purifier. Every time the dairyman is about to pour buttermilk from the *po-tat* in which it was churned into less-sacred *er-tat*-grade storage vessels, he taps the side of the churning vessel three times with a piece of *Meliosma* bark while uttering the sacred syllable *awn* to prevent the churning pot from being defiled by its proximity to an *er-tat*-grade vessel.

The need for an officiating *kur-polly kartpolkh/ mokh* to safeguard more rigorously his, and the dairy's, ritual purity is seen in the regulations governing his liaison with women, as well as in how he takes his food. He is permitted sexual intercourse only three times a week, and not at all with Töwfilly women.<sup>46</sup> When a *kur-polly kartpolkh/ mokh* eats, he must hold his leaf plate in his hands until he finishes; on no condition may he put it on the ground, as is permissible at lower-grade dairies.

When engaged in his dairy work, the *kur-polly kartpolkh/ mokh* wears a dairyman's black loincloth, again signifying his dairy's superior status vis-à-vis the *tor-folly*.

The temple buffaloes associated with the *kur-polly* differ according to the owning patriclan. One of the two extant owning patriclans has a special grade of temple buffalo called *mort-ir*,<sup>47</sup> which is of higher sanctity than the temple herds associated with the Töwfilly and Melgaash *polly*, or with the Torthash *Tor-folly*. While any Toda male may drink the milk of the lower-grade temple buffaloes, nobody may consume the unprocessed milk of a *mort-ir*. The second *kur-polly*-owning patriclan, on the other hand, has no special grade of buffalo associated with its dairies of this grade. The animals tended by the *kur-polly* dairyman at this clan are *noshpep-ir*, the same as at the clan's *tor-folly*-grade dairies.

<sup>46</sup> From this and other rules it is evident that Töwfilly women are viewed as a greater threat to ritual purity than Torthash women.

<sup>47</sup> According to Emeneau (1971:xlII), *mort-ir* means, "the buffaloes of the *mod*," i.e., 'clan', but my principal informant from Kaash patriclan said this was incorrect, but could offer no other meaning for the buffalo grade name.

Torthash Sub-caste's *Wish-olly*

Seven of the ten extant Torthash patriclans are the traditional owners of dairies ranking higher than any of those hitherto discussed. These are the *wish-olly* (from *wish* [etymology obscure] + [p]olly). Most *wish-olly* have only one room, probably because the higher sanctity of these dairies prohibits the dairyman from sleeping, eating, or keeping his secular equipment in them, hence there is no real need for a second room.<sup>48</sup> There are, however, three particularly sacred two-roomed *wish-olly*. One of these is of exceptional sanctity due to its conical shape, which makes it a *poh*, one of only two extant dairy-temple structures of its kind (see below for the second).

The daily procedures at the *wish-olly* are much the same as those already described for the *kur-polly*, but with a few notable differences. One, doubtless because the dairyman does not sleep in this grade of dairy, is that he must ceremonially enter it, bow, and touch the dairy vessels and salute the *monny*, or *monny*-place if the sacred object has been lost, in the morning and evening. Another is the special manner in which this dairyman drinks his buttermilk. At lower-grade dairies he imbibes directly from a bamboo container, but at the *wish-olly* he must first pour the buttermilk into a leaf cup. At the three most sacred two-roomed *wish-olly*, the dairyman must always face the *po-tat* shelf at the back of the inner room and must never turn his back on the *po-tat*-grade vessels, whether entering or leaving the building, or working inside it.

The dairyman serving at a *wish-olly* is known as a *wish-olkh*<sup>49</sup> and may not be recruited from either the owning patriclan or, for the most part, the same sub-caste. This rule alone sets the *wish-olly* apart from all other grades of dairy thus far discussed and highlights an important inter-sub-caste relationship among the Todas, namely, that the Torthash sub-caste owns the community's more sacred dairies but only the other – Töwfilly – usually operates these high-grade institutions. There is one exception to the rule that the *wish-olkh* must be a Töwfilly man: he may come from the Melgaash

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<sup>48</sup> Rivers (1906:73).

<sup>49</sup> The form *wish-mokh* seems never to be used, although youths may also serve in this grade of dairy.

patriclan of Torthash sub-caste.<sup>50</sup> But Melgaash *wish-olkh*, in some respects, are ritually inferior to those from Töwfilly patriclans, particularly in that they may not perform the traditional duties of a *wish-olkh* at a funeral ceremony.<sup>51</sup>

The rites that elevate an ordinary man or youth to the position of *wish-olkh* require that he first achieve the ritual status of a *tor-folly kartpolkh*, the lowest rank of Torthash dairyman. The ordination process requires a full two days for one about to become a *wish-olkh* for the first time, whereas a subsequent elevation to office can be accomplished in a single day. The two-day initiation begins early in the morning, when the candidate goes to the lower-grade dairy of the hamlet where he is to serve as *wish-olkh*. He receives his morning meal from the officiating dairyman and eats it seated on the raised platform outside the front wall of the dairy. He must stay near this dairy until evening.

The rites that elevate the *wish-olkh*-elect to the rank of *tor-folly kartpolkh* begin after the officiating lower-grade dairyman has completed his evening work. First, a man of ordinary ritual status (*per-olkh*) from the hamlet brings a dairyman's black loincloth to the dairy and gives it to the officiating dairyman, who stands in front of the entrance to his dairy with the candidate facing him. Three times the *wish-olkh*-elect asks, "Shall I don the *tüny*?" and each time the dairyman replies, "Put it on!" After raising the loincloth to his forehead, the candidate ties it around his waist while removing his ordinary white garment. Proceeding to the dairy stream, the *wish-olkh*-elect performs the ordination rites for a *tor-folly kartpolkh*, which are identical to those described above for a *polly kartpolkh*.

When the *wish-olkh*-elect has completed the rites that raise him to the status of *tor-folly kartpolkh*, he returns to the lower-grade dairy and stations himself outside the surrounding wall. Meanwhile, the officiating dairyman lights a fire of *mülly* wood with a firebrand from his dairy fire. The candidate ritually warms himself at this fire

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<sup>50</sup> This is another aspect of Melgaash patriclan's peculiar ritual position that appears to ally it with the Töwfilly sub-caste rather than to the Torthash-olkh to which it belongs.

<sup>51</sup> For which, see Rivers (1906:354, 370, 375, 376, 389, 401) and Walker (1986:217,235).

before going to a nearby *shola* (Nilgiri copse) to strip some bark and pluck seven leaves from the *tehr* tree. He performs the ritual drinking again, this time using the *tehr* leaves and bark instead of the *mülly* leaves and shoots used by lower-grade candidates. Having completed this ritual drinking, the candidate returns to the forest, collects more *tehr* bark and leaves, and returns to the dairy stream to perform the ritual drinking a second time.

After repeating the drinking with *tehr* bark and leaves a third time, he proceeds to a spot in the woods near the dairy stream that is called *Tofehr-polly*, translated by Chhabra (see below) as 'the dairy of shrubs' – presumably a Toda euphemism for this sacred place in the wilds. Here he is joined by the lower-grade dairymen, who gives him buttermilk to drink in a highly ritualistic manner. The dairymen gives the candidate two *kokud* (*Mappia foetida*) leaves, keeping two more for himself. Each man folds his leaves into a cup. Holding a bamboo vessel containing buttermilk between his knees, the dairymen tilts this so as to pour some of the liquid into the leaf cup that he holds in both hands. He pours buttermilk from this leaf into the candidate's leaf cup from which the latter drinks. The procedure is repeated until the candidate feels he has drunk a sufficient amount. Next, and for utilitarian purposes this time, the officiating dairymen builds a fire in the forest, lighting it with firebrands from his dairy. He fetches food that he has prepared in the dairy and serves this to the candidate. Both dairymen and candidate must spend the night in the forest.

The following morning the candidate collects more *tehr* bark and leaves, returns to the dairy stream, and again drinks from seven leaves in the ritual manner of the previous evening. This time, however, he repeats the sequence five times rather than three. He next returns to the forest, where he receives buttermilk from the lower-grade dairymen followed by a meal, as on the previous evening. He may not leave the *shola* during the day. He goes to the dairy stream in the evening and repeats the sequence of ritual drinking seven times before returning to the forest to receive, as before, buttermilk and a meal. Both the lower-grade dairymen and the candidate again sleep in the *shola*.

The next morning, the third after the candidate left the hamlet's domestic area, he performs the ritual drinking nine times,

thus requiring sixty-three *tehr* leaves, and then he bathes from head to foot in the dairy stream. He now proceeds to the lower-grade dairy where the dairyman has prepared a belt of jungle creeper, which the candidate ties around his waist. The dairyman has also dug up his dairy's special *muu*, which he has placed outside the dairy wall, together with a few strands of *kakarkh* grass. The candidate uses the grass to ritually sweep the ground in front of the *muu*. He then bows to the sacred vessel, touching his forehead to it before returning it to the lower-grade dairyman. The candidate has now achieved the ritual status of full *wish-olkh*. He enters the lower-grade dairy in the ritual manner described earlier, touching the two categories of dairy equipment, and for the first time goes to his own *wish-olly*. Having ritually entered this dairy, he lights the dairy's fire, cleans the vessels, and goes out to milk the buffaloes in his charge. After milking, he returns to the lower-grade dairy where he receives food from the dairyman.

The rites are slightly curtailed for the ordination of a man who has previously served as a *wish-olkh*. He need only spend one night in the forest and he performs the ritual drinking twice rather than four times, going through the sequence five times on the first evening and seven times on the following morning.<sup>52</sup>

While engaged in the work of his dairy, the *wish-olkh* must wear a black *tüny*. He may wear an ordinary cloak that he keeps in the lower-grade dairy when he is not working in the dairy or milking the buffaloes, but the cloak must be worn in a way peculiar to a man of his office, wrapping it so that the front of his body remains uncovered. The *wish-olkh* must also always wear earrings.

The rules that a *wish-olkh* must observe to guard his and his dairy's ritual purity are generally more rigorous than those for the dairyman at a *polly*, *tor-folly*, or *kur-polly*. He may neither cook nor eat in the *wish-olly*; rather the lower-grade dairyman prepares the *wish-olkh*'s food, serving it to him in the lower-grade dairy. Nor may a *wish-olkh* sleep in his own dairy, but must pass the night in the lower-grade dairy of the hamlet, where he occupies the superior bed, while the lower-ranking dairyman takes the inferior one. He is

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<sup>52</sup> Rivers' (1906:147-50) account of a *wish-olkh*'s ordination describes this truncated ceremony rather than the full sequence required for an initiate.

permitted to visit any hamlet of Torthash sub-caste, but never a settlement belonging to his own Töwfilly people. Two nights a week he may sleep with a woman, but she cannot be of his own sub-caste (unless he is a Melgaash clansman) because Töwfilly women are considered more polluting than those of Torthash sub-caste. The broom, pestle, and winnowing basket must have been removed, as must be done for other dairymen, before a *wish-olkh* enters a domestic residence. The *wish-olkh* must bathe from head to foot in the dairy stream downstream from where he takes water for the dairy before entering his dairy on the morning after he has had sexual relations.

The grade of temple buffaloes associated with the *wish-olly* are known as *wish-olly-ir*. Lower-grade animals, with the exception of Kaash patriclan's *mort-ir*, may also be milked for a *wish-olly*-grade dairy. We may thus find as many as six different kinds of temple buffalo tended at this grade of dairy: *wish-olly-ir*, *noshpep-ir*, *penep-ir*, *peshosh-ir*, *post-ir*, and *pity-ir*. The milk drawn at a *wish-olly* may be drunk only by the officiating dairyman; the buttermilk, on the other hand, may be distributed to the womenfolk, in the same manner as already described for the lower-grade dairies. The ghee, as usual, may be sold to outsiders with the profits shared by the owners of the animals milked for the *wish-olly*.

### Kerrir Clan's *Poh*

One Torthash patriclan, Kerrir, owns a dairy that according to the most recent field research by Ootacamund-based Tarun Chhabra,<sup>53</sup> belongs to a grade all of its own.<sup>54</sup> This is the *poh* 'conical dairy' at Konawsh, which is named after the younger sister of Goddess

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<sup>53</sup> See Walker (2006) for an account of Chhabra's commitment to Toda cultural heritage.

<sup>54</sup> This and other observations on the Konawsh foh attributed to Tarun Chhabra are from his still-to-be published paper 'A Migration to Konawsh' (2012), scheduled to be Chapter Seven of his forthcoming book containing a collection of essays on the Todas and related subjects. Pagination currently unavailable.

Tökishy. All Todas regard this dairy complex as being of exceptional sanctity.

Toda informants have told previous ethnographers, e.g. Emeneau<sup>55</sup> and me,<sup>56</sup> that the Konawsh-foh (*foh* from *poh*), although of great sanctity, is nonetheless of *kur-polly* grade. If Chhabra is correct when he writes that it is, "well known to Todas," that the conical dairy at Konawsh, "belongs to a unique grade," then his research also suggests a reason why earlier informants may have identified the Konawsh-foh as a *kur-polly*. Chhabra (2012) writes:

Until a few centuries ago there were two grades of dairy-temple existing at Konawsh. Besides the conical *poh*, there was a barrel-vaulted... [*kur-polly*] located nearby... [that] had to be abandoned when it ran-out of... [its] associated buffaloes...

The *poh* at Konawsh, like the *tee* dairies of old, but unlike the *wish-olly*-grade *poh* already mentioned, is located well away from domestic settlements and is architecturally unique in that it is surrounded by two stonewalls rather than one. Also, although several conical and barrel-vaulted dairy-temples in the past have been identified as *poh*, Chhabra writes that it is only the dairyman-priest at the Konawsh-foh who is designated as *poh-kartpolkh* 'the man who milks at the *poh*'.

Chhabra (2012) maintains that, "the number of rituals unique to the... [Konawsh-foh] ensures that this institution is placed in a category of its own." He also writes that, "many of the these rituals appear to be allied with those that were performed at the highest grade *tee* institution and those that are still executed at the very sacred ... [Tawrradr Clan *kog-folly* dairies]."

The *poh-kartpolkh* must be a member of the owning patriclan, in his late teens or older, have had his ears ritually pierced, and previously served as dairyman-priest in a *Tor-folly*-grade dairy. Because he would otherwise be alone at this isolated settlement, he is permitted to have a single companion with him, an unordained man or youth.

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<sup>55</sup> Emeneau (1974:64 ).

<sup>56</sup> Walker (1986:136).

It is evident that Todas regard this dairy-temple as one of exceptional sanctity from the extreme precautions taken to protect the purity of the *Konawsh-foh* and its contents, as well as the person of the dairyman-priest who serves it. Toda laymen may not approach the *poh* except in a state of high ritual purity. On the eve of a layman's intended visit, he must clean his house by smearing a paste of buffalo dung on the walls, floor, and sleeping platform; he must remove the emblems of womanhood – broom, pestle, and winnowing tray – from the building; and he must avoid sexual intercourse. On his way to the *poh*, the visitor must bathe in a stream (not the sacred stream of the dairy) that flows nearby this exceptionally sacred place.

The dairyman and his lay companion may not sleep in the dairy, but must spend their nights in a nearby hut that Todas euphemistically call *kortash*, their usual word for a calf-shed. Chhabra describes these quarters as comprising "a very basic lean-to structure – open in the front – that does not afford much protection from the elements." The two sleeping platforms, he writes, are set about a meter or more apart and at right angles one to the other so that the hut is L-shaped. This sleeping layout, Chhabra (2012) tells us, ensures that, "the two men are never in physical contact," to avoid immediately defiling the dairyman-priest. The 'calf-shed' does have a fireplace in front, with the fire compulsorily lit with an ember from the fireplace inside the *poh* itself.

The dairyman prepares food for himself and his companion inside the *poh*, but neither of them may eat there. The dairyman takes his food, Chhabra says, seated, naked except for his breechclout, "under a tree." In contrast, I was told that he sat on the outer surrounding wall of the dairy. He must take care never to put his hand to his lips; instead he squeezes his food into balls, and tosses them into his mouth. Similarly, when he drinks water or buttermilk, he must pour it from a leaf directly into his mouth, without the leaf touching his lips. The lay companion may eat and drink in the normal way inside the sleeping hut.

The *poh-kartpolkh* must remain celibate throughout the period of his priesthood; indeed, he may not even talk to women. When he does speak to anybody, according to Chhabra, he must do so



exclusively in the Toda language.<sup>57</sup> His lay companion, on the other hand, is permitted, except on three particular days,<sup>58</sup> to visit his home hamlet. Here he may indulge in sexual intercourse but, if he does, he must wait a day, presumably for the impurity to wear off, and must bathe in the stream near Konawsh on his way back to the *poh*.

Just as the precautions taken to guard the purity of the *poh* at Konawsh are more stringent than those for lower-grade dairies, so the ritual that elevates the dairyman to office is more elaborate. In order to not overburden the reader with a mass of ritual minutiae, only an overview is presented here.<sup>59</sup>

On the night before ordination, the dairyman-elect and his lay companion must sleep in the open, in a *shola* near Kerrir, the head hamlet of the owning patrician.<sup>60</sup> Chhabra (2012) records the name of the place as *tofehr-polly*, "the dairy of shrubs," the same term, as already noted, which is used at *wish-olly*-grade dairies.

The next morning, the *poh-kartpolkh*-elect walks along a specially-designated path from which he must never deviate, to the ordination stream. He removes his ordinary cloak and loincloth, but not his breechclout, upon reaching his destination. Following Chhabra's (2012) description, he rubs dried buffalo dung, which is a purification agent also applied to homes and dairy-temples, over his body, then scoops up water from the dairy stream with *tehr* bark, and employs both hands to rub down his entire body with this sacred dairy stream water.

The priestly candidate now dons two items of dress and accouterments that are provided for him by Kerrir clansmen. One is a new breechclout, while the other is a sacred accouterment unique to

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<sup>57</sup> All Toda men are conversant with Tamil; most also speak Badagu and some speak such other south Indian languages as Kannada and Malayalam; an increasing number also speak some English.

<sup>58</sup> These are the days sacred to Konawsh itself and to the clan's nearby Kashwī and Kerir hamlets.

<sup>59</sup> Chhabra's forthcoming chapter 'A Migration to Konawsh' offers a full account in which certain ritual details differ from those previously reported by Rivers (1906:79-81), and Walker (1986:135-39). It is not currently possible to conclude if earlier accounts are faulty, or whether Chhabra has recorded ritual variants and/ or innovations.

<sup>60</sup> Chhabra does not mention the dairyman-elect's lay companion also sleeping here.

the *poh* at Konawsh, namely the *kupy*. Chhabra describes this as manufactured from:

several strands of thread... taken from the black... [loincloths] worn by many categories of dairyman priest. The threads are braided together to make a band, which is then knotted at one end. When nine such bands have been produced they are bound together, with the knotted ends... hanging downwards.

The *poh-kartpolkh* suspends this *kupy* from his breechclout which, as Chhabra writes, "functions to ensure the priest's sanctity at all times." Consequently, "although other items of priestly attire are sometimes removed during the course of temple work, ... [the *poh-kartpolkh*] never removes his breechclout with *kupy* attached."

The *pohkartpolkh*-elect is now ready to begin the ordination rites proper. He first obtains purificatory *tehr* bark from a particular *Meliosma* tree in the vicinity of the dairy stream. At Konawsh, instead of the seven *mülly* leaves that are gathered by priestly candidates at other grades of dairy, the dairyman-priest-elect must search for seven leaves, each one plucked from a different species of thorny plant. Additionally, the candidate takes another seven leaves from one particular species among the stipulated seven. Proceeding to the ordination place, the dairyman-elect throws a piece of *tehr* bark into the stream three times, each time uttering the sacred syllable, "*awn*." This ritual act is known as "purifying the big [= dairy] stream." The candidate next performs the ritual drinking common to ordination rites at all dairy grades, but with some elaborations at Konawsh.

The candidate, having raised himself to a level of ritual purity sufficient for him to assume the office of *poh-kartpolkh*, may now don the other items symbolizing his high priestly office – a dairyman-priest's black loincloth, a rattan finger ring, and a priestly cord that is made by twisting together threads from a dairyman's black loincloth and long strips of the stem of a de-thorned *Girardinia heterophylla* creeper, which the *poh-kartpolkh* hangs over his right shoulder. The candidate has now achieved the ritual purity required of him to begin his dairying duties. He proceeds to the *poh*, bows at the threshold, enters, and generally follows the same series of acts as described for

the lower-grade dairies. There are certain ritual elaborations, most notable of which is the stipulation, as at a *wish-olly*-grade dairy, that he may never turn his back on the most sacred *po-tat* equipment, consequently, he steps backwards when leaving the dairy's inner sanctum.

A legend says that the people of Kerrir patriclan once borrowed buffaloes of the *mort-ir* grade to milk at their sacred *poh* dairy-temple at Konawsh. But at least since River's time,<sup>61</sup> the only animals tended there have been Kerrir patriclan's *noshpep-ir* (the same grade that they tend at their *tor-folly* dairies) along with a few domestic *pity-ir*. Neither the *poh-kartpolkh* nor anyone else may drink the milk drawn from *noshpep-ir* tended at this *poh*. Should the dairyman wish to add unprocessed milk to his diet, he must draw that milk from the domestic *pity-ir* in his care and keep it apart from the milk he has drawn from the temple animals. If milk of the *pity-ir* is mixed with temple buffaloes' milk, it is not deemed to pollute the latter but rather to attain to its level of sanctity. Buttermilk from the *poh* at Konawsh is not distributed as at lower-grade dairies; men who visit the *poh* may drink it, but it is given to women only on the day when the temple is closed and the dairy rituals terminated until the following year. On this occasion, when returning to Kerrir clan's sole remaining hamlet, the dairyman-priest's assistant takes along buttermilk produced in the *poh* to be distributed among the women of the clan. The ghee, as usual, has no sanctity and may be used in the hamlets or sold to outsiders.

### Tawrrawdr Clan's *Kog-folly*

Of the Torthash patriclans, Tawrrawdr is the sole owner of a special grade of dairy, the *kog-folly*. The name and its literal meaning, *viz.* 'big dairy', are identical to the more sacred of Töwfilly sub-caste's *polly*-grade temples. But Tawrrawdr's *kog-folly* are very different. All Todas (with the exception, perhaps, of the Kerrir people) regard this grade of dairy-temple as more sacred than any thus far mentioned,

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<sup>61</sup> Rivers (1906:79).

while Tawrrawdr clansmen believe their *kog-folly* are *tee-dairy* substitutes. The *kog-folly* at Tawrrawdr, the clan's chief hamlet, is a two-roomed building; all others are single-roomed structures like most *wish-olly*.

Tawrrawdr *kog-follys'* high level of sanctity entails more elaborate ritual and more stringent rules to protect their purity than we have yet seen, with the possible exception of those required at the Konawsh *poh* dairy. As at the three most sacred of the *wish-olly* and at the Konawsh-foh, the dairyman serving a *kog-folly* must never turn his back on the *po-tat* equipment. Moreover, in the *kog-folly*, as at the Konawsh-foh, there must be a total separation of the *po-tat* and *er-tat* grades of dairying equipment. An intermediary bamboo vessel must be employed at a *kog-folly* when transferring milk products from *po-tat* to *er-tat* vessels.

The *kog-folly kartpolkh/ mokh* must be recruited from the owning patriclan.<sup>62</sup> The rites that elevate him to office are similar to those for the *poh-kartpolkh* at Konawsh. The *kog-folly* dairyman wears a black loincloth while performing his dairy duties, which follow the same general pattern as at other dairies. He wears an ordinary cloak when off-duty. He may sleep in the outer room and keep his secular clothing there at the two-roomed dairy. However, when a one-roomed *kog-folly* is being operated, the dairyman must sleep in a 'calf-shed' that is actually a special priest's sleeping hut, as at Konawsh. In the morning, the dairyman-priest proceeds to his dairy wearing only a breechelout. An officiating *kog-folly kartpolkh/ mokh* is prohibited from entering the domestic area of the hamlet and, like the Konawsh *poh-kartpolkh*, must observe strict celibacy.

The rule was different in the past when a dairyman who had completed a year's service at a *kog-folly* was permitted to visit an ordinary dwelling and have intercourse with a woman there. In addition to the ordinary ritual precautions taken by lesser-grade priests that it not be a clan or a settlement day and that the symbols of womanhood be removed from the house, the *kog-folly kartpolkh* observed special restrictions in order to not lose his priestly office. He had to lie on his right side when engaged in intercourse and refrain

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<sup>62</sup> Rivers (1906:76-77) wrote that the dairyman could be from any Torthash patriclan, which my information contradicts.

from touching the woman with his right hand, the purer of the two; nor could she touch him with her impure left hand. Furthermore, on his return to his dairy next morning, the dairyman had to sit down three times at the places where the soil had been disturbed by moles (a stipulation my informants were unable to explain) and then to bathe at the dairy stream and put *müilly* leaves in his hair. He was prohibited from saluting the *monny* when entering the dairy on this occasion. Finally, like the dairyman-priest at the Konawsh-foh, the *kog-folly kartpolkh/ mokh* could not drink in the ordinary way but had to follow a procedure intended to protect his purity. He poured buttermilk from a bamboo vessel of *er-tat* grade into a leaf cup while seated on the raised platform outside his dairy; on no account could he drink the buttermilk inside the building. He drank three times from the cup, each time raising it to his forehead and uttering the sacred syllable, "*awn*," before drinking.

The buffaloes associated with the *kog-folly* are called *kog-folly-ir* and constitute a herd of exceptional importance. Animals of lower grades may be individually owned, but Tawrrawdr's *kog-folly-ir* are the common property of the patrician as a whole. Each clan *polm* takes charge of the herd for a period of two years (formerly it was three) and reaps the profits from it. It is noteworthy also that a *kog-folly* buffalo may never be sacrificed at a funeral.

All grades of buffalo except *wish-olly-ir* and *mot-ir* (the reasons for these exceptions is unclear) may be tended at the *kog-folly* and buttermilk may be distributed in the usual manner. But nobody, including the officiating dairyman, may drink the unprocessed milk drawn for this grade of dairy. On the occasion when a buffalo is named, however, rice may be boiled in the milk and served to male visitors.

Tawrrawdr's *kog-folly*, of all the hamlet dairies, are the closest in ritual practice to the most sacred of all Toda dairy institutions, the *tee*. Rivers (1906:76) was clearly right in suggesting that the *kog-folly* institution, "is in many ways intermediate between the dairies of the village and... the *tee*" and he noted several ritual similarities between the two institutions. An even clearer indication of the relationship between *kog-folly* and *tee* that Rivers missed but Emeneau's linguistic studies have revealed, is that the two types of dairy share a

common vocabulary to describe, "the practices of the dairy and all its accompanying operations and objects" (Emeneau 1974:7).

## CONCLUSION

Understanding Toda society and culture requires a knowledge of economic and ritual dimensions of Toda pastoralism. The ritual dimension establishes Todas as unique among India's multitude of ethnicities, and indeed unique among pastoral peoples the world over. Two observations are of note in discussing the ideological and ritual bases of Toda religion. The first is that the Todas' sacred dairy cult far exceeds in importance their theology of anthropomorphic deities. There are Toda deities in abundance, the most important being Goddess Tökishy who, Todas believe created their buffaloes and the sacred dairy institutions associated with them. Generically these deities are known as *töw-tht* 'gods of the mountains', though some are associated with rivers. For the most part, however, these anthropomorphic divinities pale in significance when compared to the *töw-nor*, 'gods of the places' (meaning 'gods of the most sacred dairy places'). Not all Toda dairies fall into the *töw-nor* category; only those isolated from domestic settlements, such as the *poh* at Konawsh, and those located in hamlets that Todas call *itwüd* 'important' or 'principal' settlements, which they believe were created by the 'gods of the mountains'.<sup>63</sup> Such sacred sites are infused with divinity, conceived mostly as a diffused force. There are times, however, when they too, like the gods of the mountains, are spoken of in anthropomorphic terms. Thus Todas sometimes talk or sing of the *töw-nor* 'becoming angry' or 'attending the council of the gods'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Less important hamlets, said to have been human-, not god-created, are called *makhmod* or 'inferior settlements'. Todas say these human-created *makhmod* have been established at times when herds at the principal hamlets became too large to be tended there. *Makhmod* dairies are ritually inferior to those of an *itwüd-mod*. Dairymen-priests are not inducted directly into them, but are ordained for, and serve for a short time in, a *töw-nor* dairy belonging to the same clan.

<sup>64</sup> See Emeneau (1971:xli).

The second observation is that the twin concepts of hierarchy and purity dominate all others associated with the Todas' sacred dairy institutions. Every element associated with these institutions is hierarchically graded. The higher the ritual status of an element, the greater must be its ritual purity and the care taken to prevent its pollution. With these concepts, the Toda community demonstrates its participation in and not alienation from the world of pan-Indic Hinduism.

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# AN A MDO TIBETAN FAMILY'S INCOME AND EXPENSES IN 2011

Rdo rje bkra shis (Dorje Tashi, Independent Scholar),  
Rta mgrin bkra shis (Independent Scholar), and  
CK Stuart (Shaanxi Normal University)

## ABSTRACT

A single A mdo Tibetan family in Brag dmar nang Village, Dkar brjid Township, Khri ka County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China is studied in terms of their expenses and income in 2011. The village has a Tibetan population of 254 residents (forty-nine households).

## KEYWORDS

A mdo, expenses, income, off-farm income, Tibetan family

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

A single, six-member A mdo Tibetan family in Brag dmar nang Village, Dkar brjid Township, Khri ka County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province,<sup>2</sup> China is described in terms of expenses and income in 2011. The village had a population of 254 residents (all Tibetan) living in forty-nine households in 2011. Data for this paper was collected through interviews conducted by the first author with the family.

## THE FAMILY

The family consists of six members: grandmother, father, mother, son, and two daughters:

- GM (female, b. 1936) is a native of Brag dmar nang Village and grew up there. She spent approximately thirty years with her husband in Dar lag County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. They returned to Brag dmar nang Village after her husband retired.
- FT (male, b. 1968), GM's son, is a native of Brag dmar nang Village. He completed his early education in Dar lag County and then enrolled in Mtsho sngon Animal Husbandry and Veterinary College in Huangyuan County, where he earned a vocational degree. He was then assigned an official job in Dar lag when he was twenty. He eventually lost this job, returned home when he was twenty-five, and began farming.
- MT (b. 1962), FT's wife, is a native of Brag dmar nang Village who completed grade five in the village elementary school. She married FT when she was twenty years old, according to the arrangement of the two concerned families.
- SN (b. 1988), GM's grandson, and FT and MT's son, is a native of Brag dmar nang Village and earned an MA degree abroad. He

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<sup>1</sup> The authors thank Gerald Roche, Rin chen rdo rje, Bkra shis dpal ldan, Timothy Thurston, and Wang Shiyong for helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> Zhemeang Village, Garang Township, Guide County, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province.

currently works for an international NGO in Zi ling (Xining), the capital of Mtsho sngon Province.

- OD (b. 1992), GM's granddaughter, and FT and MT's daughter, was born with a congenital heart defect that required two heart operations in May 2009. While the operations were successful, OD cannot do heavy work. She currently paints deity images for a private company in Khri ka County Town.
- YD (b. 1998), GM's granddaughter, and FT and MT's daughter, YD currently studies at Khri ka Primary Boarding School, Khri ka County Town.

## RESOURCES

The family has twelve *mu*<sup>3</sup> of crop land. In addition, it cultivates four *mu* belonging to a relative who operates a small health clinic in Hexi Township, Khri ka County. The family sees farming as its economic foundation, with wheat as the most important crop, which is sold for cash and provides food (bread and noodles) for the family. Other crops include potatoes, rapeseed, flaxseed, barley,<sup>4</sup> and beans. Cabbage, carrots, onions, garlic, radish, and leek are also cultivated in a small garden, and are only used for family consumption. All fields are irrigated with water originating from a spring in the Dgo rtse Mountains, which is about two kilometers north of the village.

In terms of livestock, the family sold its mule in the tenth lunar month. The family annually raises two pigs, which are fed wheat husks, rapeseed stalks, and potatoes, and then slaughtered in

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<sup>3</sup> One *mu* is equal to 0.067 hectares or 0.16 acres.

<sup>4</sup> The family rarely eats *rtsam pa* 'baked barley flour mixed with hot tea, sugar, and cheese' because of the high price of butter and the limited amount of barley the family grows. Barley is mostly used in such religious rituals as offering *bsang*, and making *gtor ma* 'cone-shaped ritual offering made from barley flour or *rtsam pa*' and when people are invited to the home to chant religious texts. Butter is only used in offering lamps during the first to fifteenth days of each lunar months; at other times rapeseed oil is burned in offering lamps.

the eleventh lunar month.<sup>5</sup> The family had pork worth about 4,000 RMB in 2011, some of which it consumed and some of which it gave to others. Most pork is stored in a freezer in the home, and the remaining pork is preserved in a clay jar containing water, salt, vinegar, and condiments.

The family regards its tractor and motorcycle as its most useful and valuable property. The tractor is used for plowing,<sup>6</sup> planting, and harvesting. The motorcycle is used to access health care and to shop in Lo yag Village, about four kilometers north of Brag dmar nang village; Sde tsha Tibetan Autonomous Township Town, approximately thirteen kilometers to the northeast; Dkar brjid Township Town; and in Khri ka County Town. The motorcycle is also used when attending wedding parties, hair changing (coming of age) rituals<sup>7</sup> for girls, religious ceremonies, and to make Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' visits in neighboring villages and to both upper and lower Sde tsha (d+hI tsha) monasteries.<sup>8</sup>

The family also owns a freezer (no refrigerator), a television, DVD player, washing machine, and a hand-pushed cart.

## LABOR

Three family members earn income to meet family expenses. GM is in her seventies and is physically unable to do hard, heavy work. She

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<sup>5</sup> The butcher is usually a Han Chinese man from Lo yag (Luoyihai) Village, Khri ka County, and two helpers from the local village are also asked to help. The main butcher is given the middle part of the pig neck. Other neck meat is given to the helpers.

<sup>6</sup> The family owns a rotary plow and a moldboard plow.

<sup>7</sup> See Tshe dpal rdo rje et al. (2010) for more on this village ritual.

<sup>8</sup> According to Tuttle (2010), the original d+hI/ Lde tsha Monastery was founded in the seventeenth century by d+hI tsha nang as a branch monastery of Bya khyung Monastery and shortly afterwards became the seat of the First Zhwa dmar Pandita (b. eighteenth century). The New/Upper d+hI tsha Monastery was founded by the Fourth Zhwa dmar Pandita (1729-1796).



offers *bsang*<sup>9</sup> and *mchod pa*<sup>10</sup> 'holy water' in the morning, lights *mchod me*<sup>11</sup> 'butter lamps' every evening, feeds the swine, makes bread, and cooks when MT is busy with fieldwork. OD only returns home for about fifteen days during Lo sar from her job in Khri ka County Town, and for about ten days during the harvest period. YD returns home during the summer and winter holidays and helps with family chores. YD's stay at home is the family's happiest time because she does much of GM's work and assists MT in the fields. SN returns home during Lo sar and on the occasional weekend, when he brings about two kilograms of mutton or beef, which are very limited in the village and expensive if available. In 2011, the cost of mutton was about forty-four RMB per kilogram and the cost of beef was about thirty-six RMB per kilogram.

FT usually leaves the village to do construction or road work in Zi ling, Reb gong,<sup>12</sup> or Yul shul<sup>13</sup> early in the fourth lunar month, returns home for harvest early in the sixth lunar month, leaves home again in the eighth lunar month after plowing, and returns home in the winter for Lo sar.

MT does household chores, e.g., cooking, feeding swine, making bread, and cleaning; such religious activities as offering *bsang*, *mchod pa*, and *mchod me*; and planting trees in spring. The family has about 500 trees on a one *mu* plot of land and also grows trees along the borders of its fields. The trees that MT planted were the family's – they were not provided by the government.

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<sup>9</sup> A smoke offering to spiritual beings made by burning a mixture of barley flour, sugar, roasted wheat, and conifer needles.

<sup>10</sup> A ritual of offering seven or fourteen copper bowls of water that are filled daily with clean water and placed in front of Buddhist images in the family shrine. The bowls are cleaned and the water is changed early every morning.

<sup>11</sup> Oil lamps that are lit daily in front of the Buddhist images at the family shrine. The family uses rapeseed oil for *mchod me* instead of butter because the former is much cheaper than the latter, which the family does not produce. This ritual is one of expiation and amending wrongdoing, appeasing hostile elements, and summoning favorable elements.

<sup>12</sup> Reb gong (Tongren) County is located in Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province.

<sup>13</sup> Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province.

Family chores require constant attention and farming requires much work, especially when irrigating, fertilizing, and applying pesticides. Irrigation was done at the beginnings of the third, fourth, and fifth lunar months and in the middles of the eighth and tenth months. Eight *mu* of cropland were cultivated for winter wheat and in spring, four *mu* of field for wheat, and the remaining four *mu* of fields were used to cultivate rapeseed, potatoes, barley, and beans. Each irrigation session requires twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

MT collected caterpillar fungus<sup>14</sup> in the Dgo rtse Mountains, about fifteen kilometers to the north. She left the home at about six a.m. and returned at about eight p.m. on foot.

#### FARM PRODUCTION

In 2011, the family harvested about forty bags of wheat, twenty bags of potatoes, eight bags of rapeseed, four bags of barley, and two bags of beans. Pork production was detailed above. Some numbers are approximate.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* results from a parasitic relationship between the larva of the ghost moth of the genus *thitarodes* and the fungus, which germinates in the larvae, kills and mummifies it, and then grows from the body of the larva. It has a high cash value as a medicinal substance.

FIGURE 1. Farm production for an Amdo Tibetan family in 2011.

Item	Cash Value RMB	Sold/ RMB Value	Gave Away/ RMB Value	Traded/ RMB Value	Consumed /RMB Value
4,000 kg wheat	8,000	2,400 kg/ 4,800	425 kg/ 850	250 kg/ 500	925 kg/ 1,850
1,000 kg potatoes	1,000	0	400 kg/ 400	0	600 kg/ 600
400 kg rapeseed	2,080	210 kg/ 1,092	0	0	190 kg/ 988
200 kg barley	520	0	0	0	200 kg/ 520
100 kg beans	400	0	0	0	100 kg/ 400
180 kg vegetables	300	0	0	0	180kg/ 300
160 kg pork	4,000	0	10kg/ 250	0	150kg/ 3,750
Total RMB Value	16,300	5,892	1,500	500	8,408

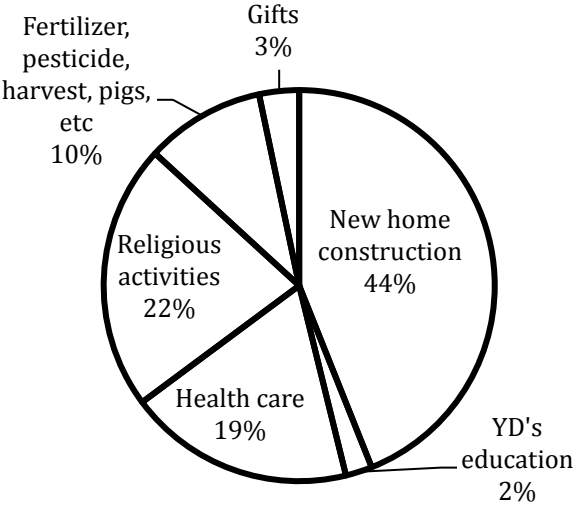
EXPENSES

FIGURE 2. An A mdo family's expenses for 2011.

#	Item	Expense (RMB value)	Lunar Month
Lo sar			
1	Lo sar festivities	600	1 <sup>st</sup>
YD's Education			
2	YD's education expenses	550	8 <sup>th</sup>
Gifts			
3	gift for a female relative's coming of age ceremony	50	1st
4	Children's Day, YD	200	5 <sup>th</sup>
5	gift: Tibetan clinic opening ceremony	200	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	funeral gift	1 tea brick + 20 RMB	7 <sup>th</sup>
7	funeral gift	1 tea brick + 200 RMB	8 <sup>th</sup>
8	funeral gift	1 tea brick + 100 RMB	10 <sup>th</sup>
9	relative's wedding party	50	10 <sup>th</sup>
Cell Phone, Coal, Mutton, Miscellaneous			
10	aluminum pot	90	4 <sup>th</sup>
11	cell phone bought in Khri ka County Town	300	9 <sup>th</sup>
12	coal	100	11 <sup>th</sup>
13	FT: transportation and other expenses to and from work outside the village	600	7 <sup>th</sup>
14	starch noodles	50	10 <sup>th</sup>
15	mutton bought in Khri ka County Town	500	10 <sup>th</sup>
16	miscellaneous	800	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Fertilizer, Pesticide, Herbicide, Harvest, Pigs, etc.			
17	chemical fertilizer	1,500	2 <sup>nd</sup>

18	pesticide	50	4 <sup>th</sup>
19	herbicide	30	6 <sup>th</sup>
20	harvest	350	6 <sup>th</sup>
21	diesel for family tractor	50	6 <sup>th</sup>
22	pigs	850	8 <sup>th</sup>
23	plastic sacks for wheat storage	60	7 <sup>th</sup>
24	gasoline	80	12 <sup>th</sup>
Health Care			
25	medical expenses, OD	600	3 <sup>rd</sup>
26	medical expenses, GM	5,000	4 <sup>th</sup>
27	health insurance for FT, MT, OD, and YD	80	
Religious Activities			
28	religious ritual	5 loaves of bread; 300 RMB;	5 <sup>th</sup>
29	pilgrimage to four monasteries	500	6 <sup>th</sup>
30	Wutai Mountain pilgrimage	5,000	10 <sup>th</sup>
31	Sku 'bum Monastery pilgrimage	800	11 <sup>th</sup>
32	religious ritual	1 loaf of bread; 60 RMB	11 <sup>th</sup>
New Home Construction			
33	plastic for new room roof	400	2 <sup>nd</sup>
34	carpenter: new room construction	2,700	2 <sup>nd</sup>
35	red bricks and cement	2,700	5 <sup>th</sup>
36	spray painter	500	6 <sup>th</sup>
37	varnish	400	6 <sup>th</sup>
38	aluminum window frames and metal doors for new room	3,400	9 <sup>th</sup>
39	new room finishing (salary)	2,800	9 <sup>th</sup>
	Total (RMB value)	32,620	

FIGURE 3. An A mdo family's expenses by item and percentage, 2011.



1. About 600 RMB was spent in Khri ka County Town to purchase five bottles of liquor, three kilograms of sunflower seeds, peanuts, candy, apples, mutton, jujubes, biscuits, crackers, vegetables, firecrackers, several bottles of carbonated drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, milk, and new clothing for OD and YD for Lo sar. The family did not purchase clothes for GM, FT, MT, or SN during Lo sar in 2011.
2. MT escorted YD to school after the summer holiday when school resumed in the seventh lunar month. This expense was for transportation, new clothes, notebooks, pens, and pencils.
3. A fifty RMB cash gift was made at a hair changing ritual held by a relative during the first lunar month.
4. On Children's Day in the fifth lunar month, MT visited YD at Khri ka Nationalities Primary Boarding School. Parents customarily give children new clothes, their favorite snacks, and a small amount of cash. Children are also often taken to a restaurant and allowed to order whatever food they like, which is generally a bowl of noodles. The listed 200 RMB expense includes these items, as well as transportation.
5. A small Tibetan clinic was opened by a relative of the family in the fifth lunar month, in Chu nub Township, Khri ka County. A simple ceremony was then held in Chu nub Township Town, attended by close relatives. The family attended the ceremony and

- gave 200 RMB as a gift.
6. Twenty RMB and one tea brick were given at a funeral for a relative.
  7. A tea brick (about ten RMB) and 200 RMB were given at a relative's funeral.
  8. A tea brick and one hundred RMB were given at a relative's funeral in the tenth lunar month.
  9. Fifty RMB was presented as a gift for a relative's wedding in the tenth lunar month.
  10. One aluminum pot was purchased in Khri ka County Town in the fourth lunar month.
  11. A new cell phone was purchased for 300 RMB for OD in Khri ka County Town.
  12. One hundred and five kilograms of coal were purchased in Khri ka County Town in the eleventh lunar month at a cost of about 0.96 RMB per kilogram.
  13. Six hundred RMB was spent on transportation, meals, and other expenses when FT left for construction work in the seventh lunar month.
  14. In the tenth lunar month, a Han Chinese man came to the village to make starch noodles from local potatoes. Processing one bag (about seventy kilograms) of potatoes into starch noodles cost about eight RMB. The family processed about six bags of potatoes, which cost about fifty RMB.
  15. The family spent about 500 RMB to purchase mutton in Khri ka County Town in 2011.
  16. Han Chinese peddlers from Huangzhong<sup>15</sup> and elsewhere come to the village by tractor and small trucks with vegetables, fruit, containers, strainers, pots, bowls, teapots, rice, and farming implements to exchange for wheat. The family's daily expenses included approximately 250 kilograms of grain (cash value ~500 RMB) exchanged for salt, green chilies, starch noodles, brown sugar, salt, oranges, apples, tomatoes, aluminum pots, metal buckets, steamers, and strainers with such businessmen. In addition, approximately 300 RMB was spent for such items as

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<sup>15</sup> A county in Zi ling City.

vinegar, soy sauce, electricity, soap, detergent, toothpaste, toothbrushes, facial cream, shampoo, electric bulbs, and mobile phone charges.

17. Chemical fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide are mainly used for wheat fields. A smaller amount is used for flaxseed and rapeseed. Fertilizers and pesticides are not used in potatoes fields. The family bought *linsuan er'an* (diammonium phosphate  $[\text{NH}_4]_2\text{HPO}_4$ ) and *niaosu* (urea,  $\text{CON}_2\text{H}_4$ ). One fifty kilogram bag of diammonium phosphate cost 240 RMB and fertilized about three *mu*. Urea was 120 RMB per fifty kilogram bag and fertilized four to five *mu*. In total, the family spent about 1,500 RMB.
18. The pesticide *xinliulin* (phoxim,  $\text{C}_{12}\text{H}_{15}\text{N}_2\text{O}_3\text{PS}$ ) was purchased for wheat during the fourth lunar month. One kilogram of phoxim cost twenty RMB in 2011, and about two and a half bags were used on about three *mu*.
19. The herbicide 2, 4-*didingzhi* ( $\text{C}_{12}\text{H}_{14}\text{Cl}_2\text{O}_3$ ) was purchased in the sixth lunar month. One kilogram cost thirty RMB and was used on eight to nine *mu*.
20. A combine was used to harvest about six *mu* of wheat in the sixth lunar month. The focus family rented the combine.
21. Diesel for the tractor cost 7.84 RMB per liter.
22. Two three-month old piglets were purchased in Khri ka County Town. One piglet cost 400 RMB and the other cost 450 RMB. In 2012, such piglets were sold for 600-750 RMB.
23. Forty plastic sacks were purchased to store wheat. Each bag cost 1.5 RMB.
24. Eighty RMB was spent on gasoline for the family motorcycle. The gasoline is usually purchased in village shops for about ten RMB per 1.5 liters.
25. OD was ill in the third lunar month. Very small blotches appeared on her body and face. She returned home and was taken to a Tibetan clinic in Sde tsha Tibetan Autonomous Township, Dpa' lung Hui Autonomous County, Mtsho shar Region by her mother for treatment. The listed expenses are only for medical treatment. The distance from the home to the clinic is approximately eight kilometers. MT and OD walked to the clinic.
26. When GM took seriously ill one night in the fourth lunar month, the family hired a car and drove to the county town hospital at



midnight with FT and SN. One night was spent in Khri ka County Hospital. The attending physician was unable to make a diagnosis and suggested going to a hospital in Zi ling (Xining), where kidney stones were diagnosed. GM stayed in the hospital for about twenty days. Listed expenses include transportation, food, and medical treatment.

27. In 2011, the per person cost for health insurance was twenty RMB. By 2012, it had doubled to forty RMB per person. Reimbursements for health care expenses are only made if the patient is treated in Dkar brjid Township Town Clinic or the Khri ka County Hospital. Insurance was not purchased for GM. OD was treated in a Tibetan clinic in Sde tsha Tibetan Autonomous County, Dpa' lung Hui Autonomous County, hence these expenses were not reimbursed.
28. The family invites local tantric practitioners to chant Gcod pa<sup>16</sup> a hundred times every year as instructed by a diviner some years ago, to ensure the well-being of all family members. The family invited five village tantric practitioners to their home, who then chanted Gcod pa the whole day during the fifth lunar month of 2011. Sixty RMB and one loaf of homemade bread were presented to each tantric monk.
29. Villagers traditionally make pilgrimages to Lha sa, and Byang gi dgon chen bzhi 'the Four Northern Monasteries'<sup>17</sup> when they grow older. Other religious sites are also visited if finances allow. GM visited the Four Northern Monasteries with three fellow villagers

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<sup>16</sup> Chanted to ensure well-being of the family.

<sup>17</sup> Shel 'byung 'khon thar tshe ring (2005) reports that Byang gi dgon chen bzhi are Bya khyung Monastery located in the west of Tsha phug Township, Dpa' lung County, founded in 1349 by Chos rje don grub rin chen; Chu bzang Monastery in Nanmenxia Township, Huzhu Tu (Mongghul) Autonomous County, Mtsho shar Region, founded in 1649 by Chu bzang sku phreng dang bo rnam rgyal dpal 'byor; Dgon lung Monastery located in Sitan Village, six kilometers northeast of Wushi Township, Huzhu County, founded in 1604 by Khri ba rgyal sras rin po che sku phreng bdun pa don yon chos kyi rgya mtsho; and Gser khog Monastery in Yamen Village, Dongxia Township, Rta thang County, Zi ling City, founded in 1650 by Btsan po don grub rgya mtsho.

- in the sixth lunar month. The expense listed here includes transportation, food, and small amounts of cash given at religious sites.
30. During the tenth lunar month, GM visited Wutai Mountain and Dga' ldan byin chags gling<sup>18</sup> with SN. The listed expense includes transportation, hotel, food, and small amounts of cash given at religious sites.
  31. During the eleventh lunar month, MT visited Sku 'bum Monastery<sup>19</sup> with two other villagers to make prostrations and circumambulate the monastery for about a week. The listed expenses are for transportation, accommodation, and food.
  32. GM complained of very painful feet during the eleventh lunar month. MT consulted Skal bzang,<sup>20</sup> who suggested that Bskang ba<sup>21</sup> be chanted. The family then invited a local tantric monk to come to their home where he chanted Bskang ba for an entire day. He was given sixty RMB and a loaf of homemade bread.
  33. The family planned to construct three new rooms early in the first lunar month, and had readied all required wood. Plastic sheeting was then purchased for roofing material. Incorporating plastic into the traditional roof of earth and wood waterproofs the roof.
  34. A Han Chinese carpenter from Lo yag Village, Dkar brjid Township, Khri ka County worked for about ten days to construct three rooms.
  35. Two truckloads of red brick and cement were purchased for the new rooms.
  36. A spray-painter was purchased jointly by three families for 1,500 RMB in Khri ka County Town to paint newly constructed rooms. Each family contributed 500 RMB.

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<sup>18</sup> A Buddhist monastery located in Beijing, founded in 1694 during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), better known by its Chinese name, Yonghegong.

<sup>19</sup> Sku 'bum/ Sku 'bum byams pa gling is one of the largest Dge lugs pa monasteries in China. It is located in Ru gsar, situated about twenty-six kilometers from the center of Zi ling City. Founded in 1583 by the third Dalai Lama, Bsod nams rgya mtsho, Sku 'bum is the birthplace of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), founder of the Dge lugs Sect.

<sup>20</sup> Bskal bzang is a well-known diviner from Sdong rgan thang Village, Dkar brjid Township, Khri ka County.

<sup>21</sup> A Buddhist scripture chanted to please the family's protective deity.

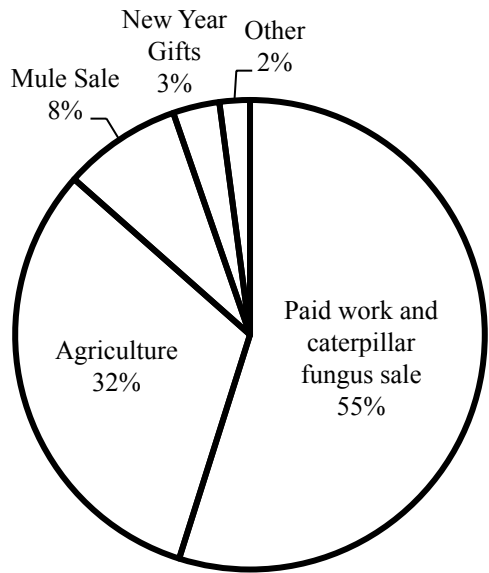
37. After constructing a traditional wood room, the wood is stained yellow and then varnished.
38. Two aluminum window frames and two metal doors were purchased in Qunjia Township, Dpa' lung County, for new rooms constructed in the second lunar month.
39. A Tibetan worker came in the ninth lunar month to finish the three new rooms constructed in the second lunar month. He covered the floors with red bricks, constructed walls with red brick, and added ceramic tiles.

## INCOME

FIGURE 4. An A mdo family's income for 2011.

#	Item	Income RMB Value	Lunar Month
Paid Work and Caterpillar Fungus Sale			
1	MT's caterpillar fungus sale	1,300	7
2	FT's construction work income	6,000	7
3	OD's salary	11,500	12
Agriculture			
4	wheat sale	5,000	6
5	wheat sale	4,800	7
6	rapeseed sale	1,000	8
Mule Sale			
7	mule sale	2,800	10
New Year Gifts			
8	Lo sar gifts	1,100	1
Other			
9	twenty-five kg wheat flour	115	6
10	SN's gifts of meat	600	occasional visits
	Total (RMB value)	34,215	

FIGURE 5. An A mdo family's income by percentage for 2011.



1. MT collected sixty caterpillar fungus in the Dgo rtse Mountains during the fourth and fifth lunar months and sold them to a Chinese woman in Khri ka County Town for 1,300 RMB.
2. FT did construction work during the fourth and fifth lunar months in Reb gong County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province, and earned about 6,000 RMB. However, the construction boss said he was unable to pay him promptly. FT had not received his salary in early 2012.
3. OD earned 11,500 RMB from her work. Her food, accommodation, and other expenses are deducted from this amount.
4. MT and a villager transported 2,500 kilograms of wheat grain to Khri ka County Town and sold it to a Chinese man in the sixth lunar month for 5,000 RMB. The wheat was that harvested in 2009 and 2010.
5. Chinese men came to the village with a small truck during the seventh lunar month, and bought 2,400 kilograms of wheat from the family for 4,800 RMB.
6. In the eighth lunar month, the family sold about 200 kilograms of rapeseed to a Chinese man who came to the village. One kilogram of rapeseed sold for about 5.20 RMB, thus the income was approximately 1,000 RMB. Chinese men come to the village with

tractors and trailers, and small trucks to purchase rapeseed, wheat, and flaxseed. The majority of village families then sell surplus grain for cash.

7. The family had a mule used to plow, plant, and for transport. However, the family felt the mule was no longer useful since they had a tractor, and sold the mule for 2,800 RMB to a Chinese man who came to the village in the tenth lunar month.
8. On the fourth and sixth day of the first lunar month, two friends of GM visited, bringing some items<sup>22</sup> and 1,100 RMB as gifts.
9. The government provides financial support to a few families for building new houses each year. In 2011, one family received 10,900 RMB and two families each received 10,500 RMB. The focus family received twenty-five kilograms of wheat flour.
10. SN brought home gifts of meat on occasional visits on weekends. SN made no other contribution and the family had no expenses related to SN in 2011.

#### LABOR EXCHANGE

In the seventh lunar month, MT was ill and FT was away from the village doing construction work. MT then asked a nephew and niece to help harvest potatoes and rapeseed. The helpers worked for one day digging potatoes and worked a second day harvesting rapeseed. MT then gave them eight bags (about 400 kilograms) of potatoes with a cash value of about 400 RMB.

#### LO SAR

On the fourth day of the first lunar month, one of GM's friends visited the home with her three sons and gave about eight kilograms of mutton, three boxes of milk, and 150 RMB to each daughter as gifts. The family then returned gifts of 200 kilograms of wheat flour, eight

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<sup>22</sup> See the Lo sar and Giving Gifts sections for details of gifts the family received.

loaves of homemade bread, and four small packages of crystal sugar (one package of crystal sugar = 500 grams) as departure gifts.

On the sixth day of the first lunar month, another of GM's friends visited with her three sons bringing twenty-two kilograms of mutton, five kilograms of butter, three kilograms of cheese, three kilograms of *gro ma* 'dried small yams', 600 RMB to GM, and 200 RMB to MT as gifts. The family gave ten kilograms of pork and fifty kilograms of wheat flour as departure gifts.

GIVING GIFTS

During the Tibetan New Year period, a family representative visits the homes of relatives, and all village families with old people. Gifts taken on such visits are commonly a bottle of liquor (~twenty RMB cash value) and a tea brick (seven to fifteen RMB). A box of milk (twenty-five to thirty RMB) is taken as a gift to maternal and paternal uncles and aunts. When visiting other families, a common gift is *sil shog*, which is refined white sugar, brown sugar, and red jujubes placed in a square of folded red and white papers; along with some bread. Return gifts are commonly a double handful of peanuts, sunflower seeds, and candies that are mixed together. Firecrackers are also given to boys, and a package of cigarettes to men as return gifts. Currently, most households give two to five RMB in cash to children as return gifts. We have not detailed such giving and receiving in 2011 because the amounts of Lo sar gifts and return gifts are roughly equal. The chart below shows other gifts:

FIGURE 6. Gifts, excluding cash, given and received by an A mdo Tibetan family in 2011.

Item	Received ~RMB Value	Given ~RMB Value
mutton (~eight kilograms)	352	0
milk (three boxes)	99	0
mutton (~twenty kilograms)	880	0

butter (~five kilograms)	220	0
cheese (~three kilograms)	78	0
<i>gro ma</i> (~three kilograms)	210	0
pork (~ten kilograms)	0	250
wheat flour (~50 kilograms)	0	360
wheat flour (~200 kilograms)	0	1,520
eight loaves of homemade bread	0	64
crystal sugar (three packages)	0	24
Total ~RMB	1,839	2,218

### CORVÉE LABOR

During the second lunar month, the village committee assigned irrigation ditch repair work to every family. FT then spent four days on this task. In the second lunar month, MT spent three days to help build village temple walls as required by the village committee.

### MANAGEMENT

Discussion of family work, corvée labor, and other duties are usually initiated by MT with FT and GM. Final decisions are then made through discussions by MT, FT, and GM together. SN, OD, and YD are not involved in such discussions. For example, selling the mule was MT's suggestion and FT, who then discussed it with GM. After they all agreed, the mule was sold in the tenth lunar month. GM generally does not oppose FT and MT because she thinks family

business should be decided by MT and FT since they now manage the family.

## DISCUSSION

Brag dmar nang villagers measure wealth on the basis of how many government workers are in a family, the number of newly constructed rooms in a home compound, and the amount of a family's cash savings, which is usually accumulated from the collection and sale of caterpillar fungus. The focus family has no members with government jobs, the mother collects and sells little caterpillar fungus, and most of the rooms of the home are not newly built. However, the family has a relatively large amount of land. This, plus its 2011 income, makes it a mid-level family in terms of village wealth.

Agriculture and off-farm work explain most of this A mdo Tibetan family's income and expenses. Fifty-five percent of the family's income was earned by paid work and the collection and sale of caterpillar fungus (sixty-one percent, OD; thirty-two percent, FT; and seven percent, MT); thirty-two percent was from agriculture (ninety-one percent from wheat sale, nine percent from rapeseed sale); eight percent from the sale of a mule; and three percent was from Lo sar gifts.

In terms of expenses, forty percent was spent on new home construction; twenty percent was spent for such religious activities as pilgrimage and chanting; seventeen percent was spent on medical expenses; nine percent was spent on fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, harvesting, and pigs; seven percent was spent for such items as a cell phone, coal, an aluminum pot, FT's transportation to and from construction work, and others; three percent was spent on such ceremonies as weddings, hair changing rituals, and Children's Day; two percent was spent for New Year celebrations; and two percent was spent on YD's education.

Agricultural activities primarily ensure food for the household and needed items through trade and sale for cash. The family feels that the amount of time, labor, and worry spent on farming – plowing, planting, irrigating, weeding, fertilizing, applying pesticides, and



harvesting – is excessive. Though some cash income is earned from selling wheat and rapeseed, prices are comparatively low.

The family's income and expenses in the year 2011 differed significantly from previous years, for example, OD earned no salary in 2009. This sharply contrasts with 11,500 RMB earned in 2011, which is the most cash income the family has ever received. In terms of expenses, the family spent nothing for new construction work in 2009. As the family's income increases, so do their expenses for improving their standard of living. It should also be noted that the sale of the mule is also an uncommon source of income, and a one-time occurrence.

The family's income stream is fragile. If, for example, OD lost her job, it is unlikely that she could find other such work. FT's work accounted for thirty-two percent of the family's income coming from paid work, however, he had not been paid in early 2012, and there are instances of workers never being paid the amount owed by construction bosses. It remains to be seen if the family will be able to maintain or increase its income in the years ahead. The stability associated with government employment is an indication of why village families feel it is ideal.

## CONCLUSION

Religious pilgrimage and religious rituals held at home demonstrate the intensity of family religiosity. This and attending funerals, hair changing rituals, wedding parties, and various ceremonies; giving gifts; and consulting diviners reflect local tradition – traditions that cannot be maintained to the same degree if people live outside the village and depend on off-farm work to generate income.

However, the future of the village may be suggested by the example of five village families. Three of these five families bought apartments in Khri ka County Town and live there. One person from each of these families has or had official government jobs. Two are now retired and one continues to work in Mgo log Prefecture. The income from government work allows these families to easily meet their family's basic needs. These families also consider town life to be

more convenient and entertaining than village life. A fourth family rents a small building and owns a small Tibetan medicine clinic in Chu nub Township Town. The fifth family (mother and daughter) bought an apartment in Chu nub Township Town and has lived there since 2007. This family was once one of the wealthiest village families. It should be noted that relatives of these families give them wheat flour, bread, and potatoes when they visit.

The family we focused on would have spent about 10,000 RMB to purchase what they consumed and gave as gifts in 2011 in terms of wheat flour, cooking oil, potatoes, vegetables, and pork. This cash expense was avoided because the family continues to farm and raise swine. Without significant additional outside income, it is unlikely the family will abandon farming within the next few years because agricultural activities provide food security and cash income through sales of wheat and rapeseed.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

2, 4-*didingzhi* 2, 4- 滴丁酯

A

A mdo ཨ་མདོ

B

Bkra shis dpal ldan བཀྲ་ཤིས་དཔལ་ལྷན།

Brag dmar nang བྲག་དམར་ནང་།

*bsang* བསང་།

Bskal bzang བསྐལ་བཟང་།

Bskang ba བསྐང་བ།

Bsod nams rgya mtsho བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

Btsan po don grub rgya mtsho བཅན་པོ་དོན་རྒྱལ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

Bya khyung བྱ་ཁྱུང་།

Byang gi dgon chen bzhi བྱང་གི་དགོན་ཆེན་བཞི།

C

Chos rje don grub rin chen ཆོས་རྗེ་དོན་རྒྱལ་རིན་ཆེན།

Chu bzang རྩ་བཟང་།

Chu bzang sku phreng dang po rnam rgyal dpal 'byor རྩ་བཟང་སུ་ཕྱེང་དང་པོ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་དཔལ་པོ་

རྩམ་རྒྱལ་དཔལ་འབྱོར།

Chu nub རྩ་ལུ།

D

d+hI tsha nang so འི་ཆ་ནང་སོ།

d+hI/ Lde tsha འི་ལྷོ་ཆ།

Dar lag དར་ལག

Dga' ldan byin chags gling དགའ་ལྷན་བྱིན་ཆགས་གླིང་། 雍和宮

Dge lugs pa དགེ་ལུགས་པ།

Dgo rtse དགོ་རྩེ།

Dgon lung དགོན་ལུང་།

Dkar brjid དཀར་བརྩིད།

Dongxia 东峡

Dpa' lung དཔལ་ལུང་།

G

Garang གར་རྟ་

Gcod pa གཙོད་པ།

gro ma གྲོ་མ།

Gser khog གསེར་ཁོག  
 gtor ma གཏོར་མ།  
 Guide 贵德

H

Hainan 海南  
 Han 汉  
 Hexi 河西  
 Huangnan 黄南  
 Huangyuan 湟源  
 Huangzhong 湟中  
 Hui 回  
 Huzhu 互助

K

Khri ba rgyal sras rin po che sku phreng bdun pa don yon chos kyi  
 rgya mtsho ཁྲི་བ་རྒྱལ་སྲས་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་སྐུ་ཕྲེང་བདུན་པ་དོན་ཡོན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་མཚོ།  
 Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ

L

Lha sa ལྷ་ས།  
 linsuan er'an 磷酸二铵  
 Lo sar ལོ་སར།  
 Lo yag ལོ་ཡག།  
 Luoyihai 洛乙海

M

mchod me མཚོ་དཀེལ།  
 mchod pa མཚོ་དཔ།  
 Mgo log མགོ་ལོག།  
 Mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།  
 Mtsho shar མཚོ་ཤར།  
 Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།  
 mu 亩

N

Nanmenxia 南门峡  
 niaosu 尿素

Q

Qing 清 Dynasty  
 Qinghai 青海

Qunjia 群加

R

Rdo rje bkra shis རོ་རྒྱལ་འཇམ་མཁའ་

Reb gong རེབ་གོང་།

Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རོ་རྒྱལ་

Rma lho ར་ལྷོ་

Rta mgrin bkra shis རྟ་མགྲིན་འཇམ་མཁའ་

Rta thang རྟ་ཐང་།

rtsam pa རུ་ཅམ་པ།

Ru gsar རུ་གསར། 鲁沙儿

S

Sde tsha སྡེ་ཚ།

Sdong rgan thang སྡོང་རྒན་ཐང་།

Shaanxi 陕西

Shel 'byung 'khon thar tshe ring ཤེལ་འབྱུང་འཁོན་ཐར་ཚེ་རིང་།

sil shog སིལ་ཤོག

Sitan 寺滩

Skal bzang སྐལ་བཟང་།

Sku 'bum སྐུ་འབུམ།

Sku 'bum byams pa gling སྐུ་འབུམ་བྱམས་པ་གླིང་།

T

Tongren 同仁

Tsha phug ཚ་ཕུག

Tshe dpal rdo rje ཚེ་དཔལ་རོ་རྒྱལ་

Tsong kha pa ཚོང་ཁ་པ།

Tu 土

W

Wang Shiyong 王石勇

Wushi 五十

Wutai 五台 (山)

X

Xining 西宁

xinliulin 辛疏磷

Y

Yamen 衙门

Yonghegong 雍和宫

Yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།

Z

Zhemeang 者么昂

Zhizha 支扎

Zhwa dmar pan+Di ta ལྷ་དམར་པ་ནི་རྟ།

Zhwa dmar pan+Di ta dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho ལྷ་དམར་པ་ནི་རྟ་དགེ་

འདུན་བཟང་འདོན་གྱི་མཚོ།

Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།





ARCHITECTURE IN THE BO, 'BRUG CHU, AND CO NE COUNTIES,  
GANNAN TIBETAN AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE, GANSU

Chos dbying rdo rje (Independent Scholar)

ABSTRACT

Thirty-nine images of architecture in The bo, 'Brug chu, and Co ne counties (Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, China) are presented. The author also relates his experiences of travelling through the area in 2010.

KEYWORDS

architecture, 'Brug chu, Co ne, Gannan, The bo

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In the winter of 2009-10, I traveled to Co ne, The bo, and 'Brug chu counties in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, to photographically document local architecture. I expected to take photographs of local houses, fences, walls, bridges, water mills, and *ma Ni* wheels. I decided to focus on local architectural styles and building materials in order to highlight regional differences. I was excited to take such a long journey, and started out on the first of January from my home in Zho 'ong dpyis Village, located between Reb gong County town and Bla brang Monastery. Because this was my first time to travel so far by myself, I was initially anxious.

I arrived in Bla brang after a two-hour bus trip and immediately departed to Gtsod City, capital of Gannan and two hours from Bla brang by bus. I met a relative in Gtsod who worked part-time in a hotel and stayed with him for a night. He showed me a map, pointing out the three counties I would travel to and advised me on how to keep safe: not to stare at people, not to take out my camera in crowds, and not to stay out late at night. He and his colleagues suggested I would have a difficult time: "You won't understand their dialect and they won't understand yours."<sup>2</sup> This made me more anxious. Based on their description of the area, I decided to go to The bo County first, then to 'Brug chu, and finally to Co ne.

The next morning, I took the bus from Gtsod to The bo County Town, where I arrived after six hours. On the way, part of the road was unpaved and covered with ice in which several trucks and buses were stuck. Fortunately, my bus passed easily. The mountains beside the road were steep and high, and traversing them gave me the feeling of slipping between a wolf's fangs.

I had a classmate in The bo who lived in a small mountain village southwest of the county town. I phoned him as soon as I arrived and he invited me to come to his home in Brag sgam nang

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Gerald Roche, Elena McKinlay, and Kelly Ward for assistance in editing the text and images.

<sup>2</sup> Locals in The bo and surrounding areas refer to the dialect spoken there as The bo skad 'The bo Language'. Although clearly related, it is basically unintelligible for speakers of other varieties of A mdo Tibetan.

Village and stay for several days. He came, picked me up, and we then went to his village by taxi. To get there, we passed through a wide valley, the sides of which were covered by thick forest.

According to a village elder, the village had been given its name based on its geographic location. Brag sgam nang literally means 'inside a rocky box', and as I beheld the village for the first time, I saw that this name was no exaggeration. The small village was surrounded by white rocky mountains on every side. Seeing this magnificent view made me recall the words of my relative, a *sngags pa* 'tantric practitioner', who had been to several places in The bo County to undertake *grong chog*<sup>3</sup> during his youth. He had told me, while shaking his head slowly in disbelief, "Thick forests cover the area and just looking at the steep mountains will frighten you. There are many wild animals there." What he said turned out to be true, except for the wild animals; perhaps they had all been hunted to extinction.

I took photos of local architectural styles and building materials of houses, fences, walls, and water mills in Brag sgam nang. For the first several days, my classmate assisted me as I walked around the village but, as I became more familiar with the area, I was able to work alone. Late each afternoon, I returned to my classmate's home and asked his family members to tell me about what I had taken pictures of that day.

I joined a game of basketball with some young men one day while out taking photos in the village. Seeing their impressive physiques reminded me of what my grandfather had said before my departure, "In the old days,<sup>4</sup> The bo nang<sup>5</sup> was a hive of bandits. People there were wild and short-tempered." As I played basketball, I thought about what Grandfather had said. Not understanding their local dialect made it very difficult for me to communicate with the basketball players, increasing my suspicion of them. However, all the

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<sup>3</sup> *Grong chog* is a form of itinerant mendicant religious practice through which monks and other religious practitioners generate income. As the practitioner travels he is hosted by families who pay cash and provide food and lodging in exchange for chanting and other religious services.

<sup>4</sup> I.e., prior to 1958.

<sup>5</sup> The term, The bo nang, 'Inner The bo' is a synonym for The bo County.

villagers treated me well and were very kind to me, which made me realize that Grandfather was talking about the past; the world is a very different place now.

At first I was mute among the villagers, but after several days I was able to have simple conversations with children. For example I could say, "What is your name?" "Let's go!" "Could you help me?" and, "Which school do you go to?" This helped me to be more independent.

After several days of taking photos and getting to know the villagers, a young man informed me that there was a large cave above the village. My classmate and I drove up to the cave on motorbike, and asked his father about the cave after we returned. He was unsure whether what he told us was true, but said, "Long ago, King Khri srong lde btsan<sup>6</sup> sent 3,000 Tibetan soldiers to this area to guard the border of his kingdom. When the army first arrived, they set up camp in that cave." As I struggled to understand this short, simple story, I realized the importance of understanding the local dialect when undertaking research.

The bo County has much forest and all local buildings are constructed of wood. For example, the local two-story houses are all wooden, as are fences, water-turned *ma Ni* wheels, and flourmills. This is very different from my home area – Zho 'ong dpyis and the surrounding region – where wood is a scarce and highly valued building material. Except for house pillars and some carved decorations, most construction in Zho 'ong dpyis is rammed earth.

Houses in Brag sgam nang typically have two floors and unlike many other Tibetan areas, lack an enclosed courtyard. House walls are made from several different materials in at least three styles. The first floor is generally built from stacked, untreated logs. The second floor may be made from stacked planks or wattle and daub.

I decided to leave for 'Brug chu County after a week in Brag sgam nang, and asked several villagers and taxi drivers for advice about which places to visit there. They all recommended I visit 'Bab bzang Township, which is the only Tibetan township in 'Brug chu

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<sup>6</sup> King Khri srong lde btsan (742-794 CE), the thirty-eighth king of the Tibetan Empire.

County .

I departed The bo on 12 January and arrived in 'Brug chu County town,<sup>7</sup> where I was surprised to not see any Tibetans. All the citizens seemed to be Han Chinese, although I did see some Salar<sup>8</sup> restaurants. Local taxi drivers and the owner of the hotel where I stayed helped me locate Tibetan communities and Tibetan architecture. They also explained how to reach 'Bab bzang Township. Following their instructions, I went to 'Bab bzang Township, hoping to find Tibetans.

When I reached 'Bab bzang, I saw no one wearing Tibetan-style clothes, nor did I hear anyone speaking Tibetan. People seemed totally Sinicized. For example, in Upper 'Bab bzang Village, I met an old man who said he was Tibetan, and had a Tibetan name, but wore a black suit and spoke the local Chinese dialect to me when introducing his village.

Unlike in The bo County, there are no forests in 'Brug chu. Locals use stone to build walls, fences, toilets, and houses – almost everything except for such furniture as cupboards and tables.

Slate is used in construction in several ways. One method is to lay stones randomly one upon the other, while another method is to place them in rows, with each row slanting in a different direction. Mortar is placed between the stones and the rows. Wooden pillars are used to support walls and houses. I took many photos of styles and materials in 'Bab bzang. Since I did not know anyone, I went alone to unfamiliar places.

Most houses in the area have two floors. I did not locate any water mills, monasteries, or *ma Ni* wheels in 'Brug chu County.

I also went to Danian, a nearby township, that was settled by Han migrants from other provinces and from other places in Gansu. I met four Han youths in the village, one of whom informed me that his grandfather had came from Shanxi Province.

After a week in 'Brug chu County, I departed to Co ne County Town, the last stop on my journey. I had previously asked a friend from Co ne County to recommend some relevant sites to me, and he

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<sup>7</sup> This town was partially destroyed by a landslide on 22 July 2010.

<sup>8</sup> An Islamic minority group mostly resident in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Haidong Region, Qinghai Province, China.

had listed several places, one of which was Chos dbal bzang.

After reaching Co ne, local taxi drivers told me that Chos dbal bzang had a large Tibetan population, so I decided to go there first. Chos dbal bzang is located in southern Co ne County, bordering The bo County. It has much forest and, therefore, the architecture is similar to that of The bo County. For example, all the materials are wood and all the houses have two floors. However, one important difference is evident in house roofs: Chos dbal bzang houses have flat roofs that are covered in earth while roofs in The bo are peaked and covered in wooden tiles weighed down by stones.

I departed to a Tibetan township in the north of Co ne County after a day in Chos dbal bzang. This township neighbors Gtsod, and the houses there were very different from those in southern Co ne. All houses were single-story, rammed earth houses, almost identical to houses in Bla brang and Reb gong. Seeing these houses made me feel that I was closer to my home area.

I visited several large monasteries in Co ne County but, as these monasteries were Dge lugs pa, the structure of the temples, the paintings, and the materials were almost identical to those in such areas as Bla brang and Reb gong. I visited Dar rgyas gling, the largest monastery in Co ne County, which is located on a hill two kilometers above Co ne County Town. A monk at the monastery told me that, with 900 years of history, Dar rgyas gling is the oldest monastery in A mdo. It was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and rebuilt in the 1980s, when painters were invited from Reb gong. I was unable to discern any architectural features distinguishing Dar rgyas gling from Dge lugs monasteries in Reb gong.

On January twenty-fourth, I returned to Zho 'ong dpyis with 620 photographs of the architecture of The bo, 'Brug chu, and Co ne counties. I realized that even though these three areas neighbor each other, they have very different architectural styles. Most houses in the area have two floors but lack enclosed courtyards. However construction materials, methods, and styles differ throughout the region.

I present the best images from this trip in the pictures that follow to illustrate the unique architectural characteristics of each location and, thus, highlight the diversity of the area.

FIGURES

- Figure 1. Tshogs chen 'du khang of Dar rgyas gling Monastery, Co ne County, is said to be the monastery's largest temple and able to accomodate all the monastery's monks during chanting sessions. There are approximately 900 monks and all come here to chant every day.
- Figure 2. Brag sgam nang Village is surrounded by rocky mountains. All the houses have two floors. Houses were traditionally made from wood, but villagers have recently begun using brick.
- Figure 3. This uninhabited, dilapidated, wooden house with two floors was a *grwa shags* 'monk's quarters'.
- Figure 4. This is the second floor of a house in The bo County. The roof is peaked and livestock fodder is stored in a large space between the roof and the ceiling of the second floor.
- Figure 5. Almost every part of this house is wood. A shrine, storeroom, and several bedrooms are on the second floor. The first floor is used as a living room in winter. Livestock are housed separately on the first floor.
- Figure 6. These are two types of house walls in The bo. Wattle and daub is used on the second floor, while the first floor is made of logs.
- Figure 7. This *me srung* 'fire guard' room is just above Brag sgam nang. Since all houses are wood, villagers post a rotating lookout here from dusk until midnight every day to watch for fires in the village. Village households take turns to man the lookout, and other villagers come to chat with them while they are on guard.
- Figure 8. Roadside fences.
- Figure 9. Wood is used for fences.
- Figure 10. These small structures contain *ma Ni* wheels turned by water.
- Figure 11. Newly built and painted *ma Ni* wheel houses.
- Figure 12. The toilet entrance is on the second floor. It is built high up by a field, facilitating transport of manure to the field.

Figure 13. Villagers refer to these structures as *blo bzo*. Crops are hung here to dry after harvest, out of reach of livestock. They are located by the road, making it convenient for villagers to transport their crops home by tractor.

Figure 14. These *blo bzo* are located by a field.

Figure 15. A water mill in a big valley that sometimes floods after heavy rain. The mill is downhill from a boulder that redirects flood waters around it.

Figure 16. 'Bab bzang Tibetan village in 'Brug chu County is locally considered to be the only Tibetan community in the county. All houses have two floors and are made of stone.

Figure 17. This slate house in 'Brug chu County features mortar between the stones. Wooden pillars are used inside the rooms.

Figure 18. This family house is surrounded by stone walls. The second floor is generally for storage, while people live on the ground floor.

Figure 19. Construction of this house had just begun.

Figure 20. Angled vertical slate slabs are mortared with cement.

Figure 21. A stone fence made by stacking stones horizontally without mortar.

Figure 22. A stone toilet.

Figure 23. Stone is used to construct roads, fences, gate-posts, and houses.

Figure 24. Drying racks in a yard surrounded by a fence.

Figure 25. A family home in northern Co ne County, neighboring Gtsod. Local houses are made of rammed earth

Figure 26. A house in the beginning stage of construction.

Figure 27. A house in northern Co ne. The house and the surrounding courtyard wall are made of rammed earth.

Figure 28. Rammed earth is used to construct fences around fields in northern Co ne.

Figure 29. Yul mdzes tshal Village in southern Co ne County neighbors The bo County. Much timber is locally available, so houses here and in The bo are very similar except for flat roofs as in this image.



Figure 30. This family house in Yul mdzes tshal is mostly made of wood. Guest rooms and the family shrine are on the second floor and a living room and kitchen are on the first floor.

Figure 31. A wooden fence in Yul mdzes tshal resembles those in The bo County.

Figure 32. Drying racks in Yul mdzes tshal Village are located near a road.

Figure 33. Such gates are only seen in Co ne County. It has two entrances: a large, wide one and a small, narrow one.

Figure 34. A stupa near Co ne County's largest monastery, Dar rgyas gling.

Figure 35. This curtain protects the temple from wind and sunshine. Such features are rarely seen in newly built temples.

Figure 36. This small temple is in Yul mdzes tshal. People come here to circumambulate in their spare time.

Figure 37. This stupa-like temple is in Dar rgyas gling Monastery.

Figure 38. Statues on an exterior wall of a temple in Dar rgyas gling Monastery.

Figure 39. A detail of the statues seen in Figure 38.













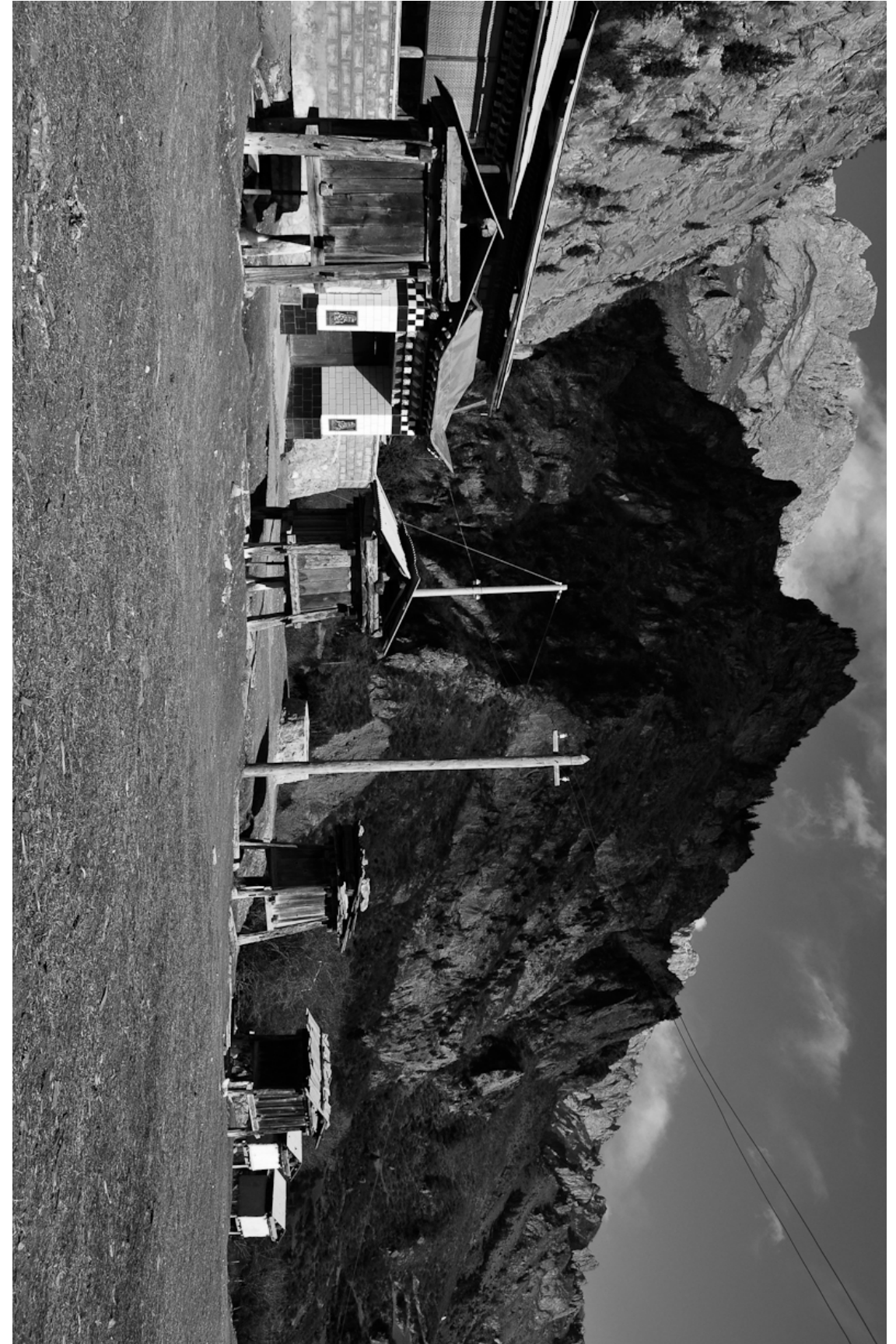






























































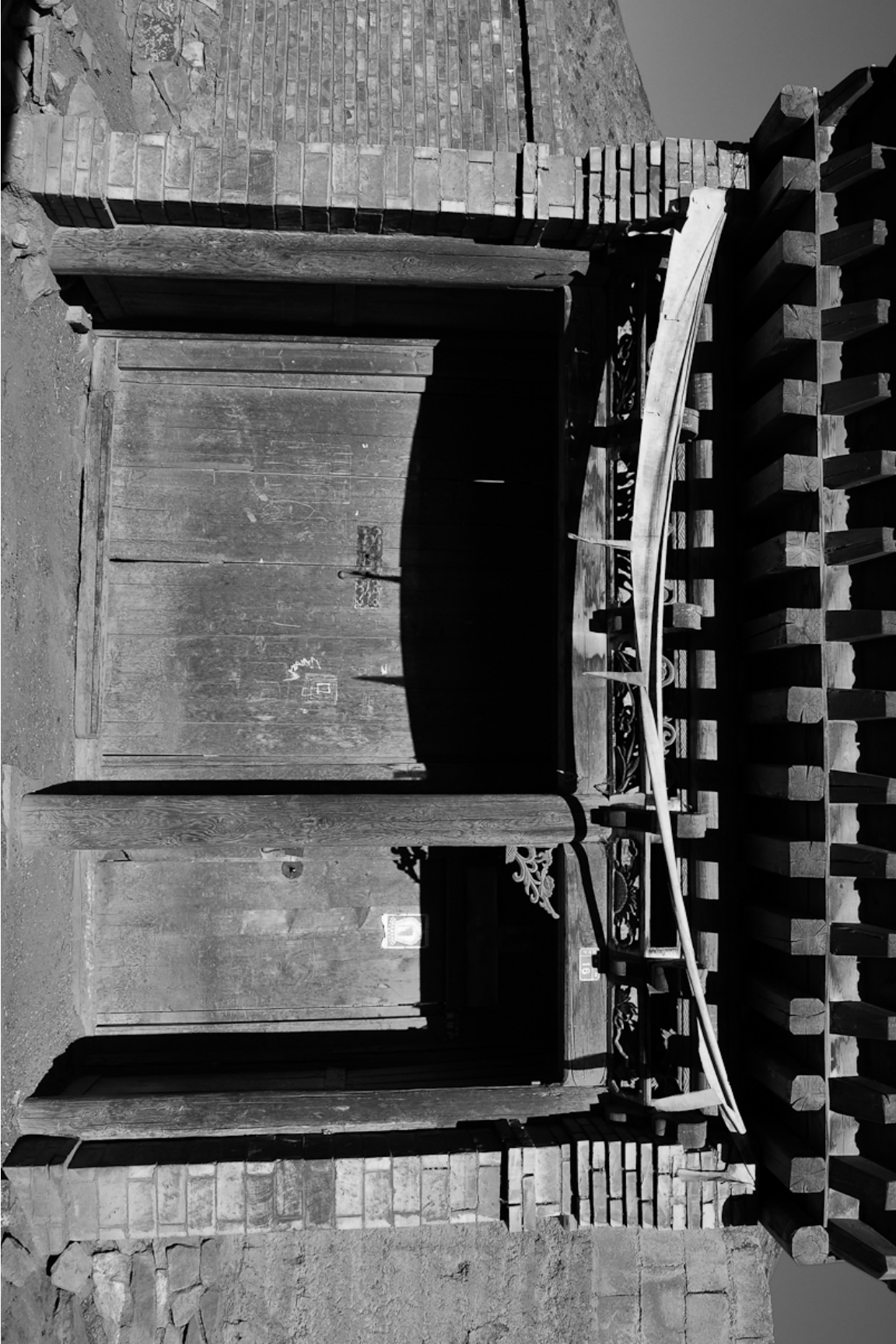




























# NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Bab bzang འབབ་བཟང་།  
 'Brug chu འབྲུག་ཚུ།  
 A mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
 Bla brang བླ་བར་།  
 blo bzo བློ་བཟང་།  
 Brag sgam nang བྲག་སྒྲམ་ནང་།  
 Chos dbal bzang ཆོས་དབལ་བཟང་།  
 Chos dbying rdo rje ཆོས་དབྱིང་རྡོ་རྗེ།  
 Co ne ཙོ་ནེ།  
 Danian 大年  
 Dar rgyas gling དར་རྒྱས་གླིང་།  
 Dge lugs pa དགེ་ལུགས་པ།  
 Gannan 甘南  
 Gansu 甘肅  
 grong chog རྩོང་ཆོག་།  
 grwa shags རྒྱ་ཤགས།  
 Gtsod གཙོད།  
 Haidong 海東  
 Khri srong lde btsan ཁྲི་སྟོང་ལྡེ་བཙན།  
 ma Ni མ་ཏི།  
 me srung མེ་སྟུང་།  
 Qinghai 青海  
 Reb gong རེབ་གོང་།  
 Shanxi 山西  
 sngags pa སྒྲགས་པ།  
 The bo ཐེ་བོ།  
 The bo nang ཐེ་བོ་ནང་།  
 The bo skad ཐེ་བོ་སྐད།  
 Tshogs chen 'du khang ཚོགས་ཆེན་འདུ་ཁང་།  
 Xunhua 循化  
 Yul mdzes tshal ལུལ་མཛེས་ཚལ།  
 Zho 'ong dpyis ཞོ་འོང་དབྱིས།



CHANGE, REPUTATION, AND HAIR:  
A TIBETAN FEMALE RITE OF PASSAGE IN MTHA' BA VILLAGE

Blo bzang tshe ring (Independent Scholar)  
Don 'grub sgrol ma (Qinghai Normal University)  
Gerald Roche (Qinghai Normal University) and  
CK Stuart (Shaanxi Normal University)

ABSTRACT

Cultural change is examined through a case study of a female rite of passage in Mtha' ba Village, Bsang chu County (Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Region, Gansu Province, China). The ritual is described and patterns of social, cultural, economic, and technological change on the Tibetan Plateau are examined. The importance of reputation and competition, as well as the symbolic significance of hair, are explored in Tibetan contexts.

KEYWORDS

Bla brang, competition, female, hair, reputation, rite of passage, social change

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Few references exist dealing specifically with Tibetan women's hair changing ceremonies. Tibetan publications report only on hair changing in the context of wedding ceremonies. Chab 'gag rdo rje tshe ring (1983), Tshe 'grub (1991), Blo bzang (1987), and Hu'u pen (1984) each report orations given at hair changing rituals. Unfortunately, these materials are offered without data as to who the orators were, when the speeches were given, or by whom and how they were collected. Nam mkha' (2002) reports on hair changing rituals in the past, held for girls who were thirteen years old in Bya khog Village, Kos nan County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. Tang (2002) also writes that the ceremony confers adult social status on girls. He notes that hair dressers in the past were only married women carefully selected for their beauty, undamaged teeth, good eyesight, and so on. The girl's hair changing ceremony, Tang notes, announced that she was old enough to care for a family, ready to accept boys coming to propose, and ready to marry. After the hair changing ceremony, village boys made efforts to sleep with the girl and asked her to marry them.

Very little information on Tibetan hair changing rituals is found in English language literature. Tshe dpal rdo rje et al. (2009) provide a detailed chronological description of hair changing rituals in Khri ka County (Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province), that includes both a generalized description of the ritual process, and a specific description of a single ritual in 2007. 'Brug mo skyid et al. (2010) discuss hair changing rituals in the context of marriage ceremonies in Stag rig Village (Shar lung Township, Khri ka County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province). Though Makley (2007) briefly mentions the hair changing ritual of Bla brang, few details are provided. Sa mtsho skyid and Roche (2011) briefly discuss hair changing, which they call Skra phab 'Hair Taming' in Phug sde Village (Bla brang Township, Bla

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<sup>1</sup> The first author thanks the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia for sponsoring his graduate study at Silliman University, Dumaguete, Negros Oriental, the Republic of the Philippines that included a thesis that forms the basis of this paper.

brang County) in their discussion of purity and fortune in village rituals. Finally, Stubel (1958) makes a passing reference to girls in nearby Gtsos (current capital of Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture) having their hair dressed for the first time at the age of seven.

## THE HAIR CHANGING RITUAL

### Ornaments

Key consultants recalled that, in the past, jewelry worn in the hair changing ritual was small, and was used not to display wealth but more to ensure good luck, good health, or a good life for the girl in her future as an adult and a mother. In the past, jewelry was mostly made of silver and could be borrowed from friends or relatives. Jewelry today is mostly gold and larger than in the past. There is also some degree of competition in jewelry design. The latest, most fashionable designs are preferred, but should retain a modicum of reference to traditional aesthetics.

Parents begin considering preparations for the hair changing ceremony when their daughter reaches the age of fifteen, two years before the ceremony is typically performed. This preparation stage gives parents time to raise funds for an expensive celebration and also ensures that the celebration is socially accepted and appreciated, and hence, successful in improving their reputation. Preparations might begin with purchase of coral or gold necklaces, gold earrings, gold bracelets, and silver milk bucket holders decorated with coral. The family's wealth determines the number and variety of ornaments.

There is no generally prescribed ornament design. Parents are mainly influenced by their experiences of attending the same celebrations where those attending evaluated ornament designs on display. Designs receiving the most appreciation are usually adopted or improved by parents who subsequently celebrate hair changing for their daughters.

A family of ordinary wealth spent at least 5,000 RMB for gold

earrings, 3,000 RMB for gold finger rings, and at least 6,000 RMB for a coral necklace in 2009. These three items are considered mandatory. Once acquired, ornaments are kept in a safe place at home until the day before the celebration.

Such other ornaments as gold necklaces, bracelets, and silver milk bucket holders are optional, and bought if the family's finances permit. The cost of these items is at least an additional 18,000 RMB.

Ornaments sold in local shops are expensive and of comparatively low quality and consequently, many parents travel to such distant market centers as Ka chu (Linxia) Hui Autonomous Prefecture or Sku 'bum (Ta'er) Monastery in Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province to purchase higher quality, though cheaper ornaments. Once acquired, relatives and friends visit the home to help assess the quality and presentability of the ornaments.

The most expensive ornament used in the ritual is *skra* 'ritual hair' – cloth panels decorated with silver discs, amber, and turquoise that are tied to the girl's braided hair.<sup>2</sup> This ritual hair is considered to be so expensive that only very rich families can afford to own it. In 2009, only one or two village families owned ritual hair. Most families who could not afford *skra* borrowed from those who have them for their daughters' celebration.

## Clothes

After preparing the ornaments, parents concentrate on choosing acceptable robes, shirts, hats, shoes, and ritual hair to be used by their daughter during the ritual. During autumn and early winter, new fashionable clothing appears on the market, including Tibetan robes used only during such special occasions as the New Year. The girl participates in choosing clothing. Quality and color are emphasized. However, she should always discuss and seek approval

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<sup>2</sup> Hair ornaments show local variation. The hair ornaments worn in Mtha' ba Village are locally referred to as Li thang ornaments. Ornaments worn in nearby Phug sde Village differ from those worn in Mtha' ba, but are similar to those of the nearby Rgan rgya grassland (Sa mtsho skyid, personal communication).

from parents and friends on the most appropriate attire, which must be considered fashionable. There is a preference for designer clothes as long as they satisfy the required traditional designs and the prescribed colors.

One design for women's traditional robes prevailed in the past because the village had few tailors. The robe was ankle-length. The sleeves widened at the openings and, when standing, fell to the ankles. Robes were made of sheepskin except for a cloth trim at the bottom and the top fold of the robe that created a pouch above the waist. Such robes required about ten sheepskins and lasted about ten years when worn daily. Large robes could be used while sleeping for they covered the entire body. Such robes also had a large pouch and belongings and babies could be carried there. The robes were brown or gray depending on the skin-softening process. Popular colors for robes today are white, red, brown, and blue. Sheepskin robes now tend to be thinner and have less wool.

Hats worn during the ritual were originally lambskin, but locals' increasing wealth saw many people trim hats with fox skin until an influential Buddhist teaching in 2006, after which locals used lambskin.

Traditional boots were made of leather and cloth. At present, however, celebrants prefer high-heeled leather shoes because girls wish to appear taller.

Fashionable Tibetan robes in the past were usually made of silk with several bright colors and cost about 1,000 RMB. Silk shirts cost around 300 RMB, lambskin hats cost 300 RMB, and popular shoes cost 200 RMB. A family therefore spends at least 1,800 RMB on clothing.

## Food

Traditionally, butter, *rtsam pa* (barley flour), and yogurt are homemade and considered important foods to be displayed and eaten at gatherings. Bread is also an important food item on such occasions. Both homemade and commercially produced breads sold in the

market are served to guests, including *go dmar* 'red bread,' which includes various forms of deep-fried wheat flour bread. At present, most families buy bread from local Tibetan or Muslim bakeries. Baked bread is round while red bread is square-shaped and about the size of the palm of a hand. Families prefer to order bread from the bakeries because it is very convenient. A family spent at least 500 RMB on bread in 2009.

As at other feasts, meat has a special place in a hair changing ceremony – it is the most important food served. For this purpose, a family butchers one or two yaks, depending on yak size and fatness, or purchases the equivalent. A medium-size yak provided 120 kilogram of meat and cost around 2,500 RMB in 2009.

The meat is chopped into pieces and fried with vegetables or boiled and served in large chunks. Important guests, relatives, and close family friends are served mutton in addition to beef. Offering mutton shows respect and intimacy. A butchered sheep produces about thirty kilograms of mutton and cost around 700 RMB in 2009. Mutton is locally considered tastier and is more expensive than beef.

Boiling meat is the first step. Once cooked, the soup is kept for cooking noodles. Stuffed dumplings are also prepared with the help of relatives and neighbors who visit the family before the celebration. The number of guests is estimated and five dumplings are prepared per guest. One dumpling is counted as equivalent to a small plate of noodles served to an individual.

Cooked dishes of fried meat with cabbage, broccoli, celery, mushrooms, eggplant, potato, green onion, and garlic, and cold dishes are served. Vegetables cost around 500 RMB and are served for lunch or dinner. Tea with bread and *rtsam pa* are served for breakfast. Rice with sugar, cooked *gro ma* 'wild yams', and *mar khu* 'melted butter' are prepared a day before the ceremony and served either before or after meals to guests.

Drinks are generally purchased in local markets. Huanghe (Yellow River) and Qingdao beers are popular, and liquor is also served. These drinks are often purchased several days earlier to be able to get a better price. The family spends at least 1,000 RMB for liquor and 500 RMB for beer. Liquor and beer are displayed on tables with the food. Guests drink liquor and beer as they like. It should be



noted, however, that in the eleventh day of the second lunar month of 2010, the villagers took a collective oath to stop drinking alcohol, and beer and liquor were no longer offered.

Children are given soft drinks and non-alcoholic beverages including Coca-cola, Pepsi, and Sprite, which are bought several days before the celebration, costing the family about 2,500 RMB.

### House Preparations

The hair changing ceremony is always held in the girl's home, which is prepared before the celebration by family members and relatives who come prior to the ceremony to help. Rooms are cleaned and prepared for older and important guests. Around ten thick wool mats are prepared for the yard and ten long tables for serving food. These items are usually borrowed from the village shrine in consultation with the shrine manager. Ten thick wool cushions are spread on the yard, where children and young women are seated.

### People Involved

In the past, each village family was required to send a representative to hair changing celebrations. At present, however, attendance prescriptions are no longer strictly observed. The family makes no direct, formal invitations to villagers. Phone calls are made only to relatives who live far away. Information about the celebration is shared at the village shrine where older villagers chant, chat, sing, hold community meetings, and retell information to others who are present, and who then pass it on to other villagers. When a family has this celebration, all the other villagers are expected to attend because it is assumed that they already know about the occasion.

## The Hair Changing Day

The girl is prepared for the celebration before sunrise on the morning of the scheduled day of the ceremony. Two unmarried female friends or relatives selected by her parents assist the girl throughout the celebration. Ideally, they are fifteen to eighteen years of age and from wealthy families with good reputations. The girl's hair is braided before she puts on her jewelry, clothes, shoes, and so on. This is done by a *skra sla ma* – a female who dresses hair in such rituals. The *skra sla ma* should be a woman who is skilled at braiding, is considered morally upright, has several children, and is from a household with a good reputation. This woman should also be free of mental and physical illness and disabilities, and may not be a widow or divorcee. Only one woman (b. ~1929) qualified to be a *skra sla ma* in the village in 2009. The *skra sla ma* starts by making small braids from the forehead and then makes nine braids at the back of the girl's head. The nine braids are tied together to form a ponytail. The other small braids hang at the sides of the head. In the past, the girl's braided hair was kept until the eighth day after the celebration. At present, the braids are untied after two days. The family traditionally gave the *skra sla ma* a sheep limb as a gift but now give, for example, twenty to thirty RMB or a bolt of silk and satin. Braiding of hair has recently been done by women other than the traditionally designated *skra sla ma*.

After braiding the girl's hair, her assistants help her put on other clothing and ornaments. Makeup is also applied.

The ritual hair is the last item put on the girl and is tied around her head. It is around one and half meters long and roughly twenty centimeters wide. The ceremonial hair hangs at the girl's back down to her hips.

Now fully attired, she enters the room where the family shrine<sup>3</sup> is located and kowtows three times, or stands and touches her head to the shrine. Immediately afterwards the girl's parents put a

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<sup>3</sup> The *mchod khang* is a family shrine inside the house where family members pray to images of the Buddha, Buddhist scriptures, and photographs of reincarnation lamas. Butter lamps and containers of sacred water are also placed in the shrine.

*kha btags* (a white, ceremonial strip of cloth) around her neck. She now has adult status, as described below.

The girl and her two assistants walk out from the former's house to present her to all her relatives in the village by visiting their respective homes. Her paternal relatives are first visited, after which she goes to her maternal relatives' homes.

During visits, gifts are given and received. For example, the girl brings fruit and candy to the family instead of arriving empty handed and families in turn give her a gift. One of her two assistants is in charge of bringing and giving gifts to the relatives. The other assistant is responsible for accepting and carrying the gift received. Gifts given and received are usually clothes and tea bowls wrapped in pieces of white and yellow cloth.

While in her relatives' home she and her assistants are offered tea and bread. After visiting all her relatives in the village, she and her assistants return to her home where guests, relatives, and friends have gathered and wait to welcome her as a new adult member of the village. All guests celebrate this ritual by eating, drinking, singing, and dancing, which may extend well into the night.

#### SOCIAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY TIBET

In the early twenty-first century, Tibetan culture and society are in dramatic flux. There are many reasons for this: sweeping economic changes, state education in the Chinese language, the availability of electricity and thus access to images and sounds of the wider world in individual homes, and vastly improved transportation facilities.

China's recent and enormous economic growth began in large part when Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) launched a new development program to modernize China's economy in 1978, that opened China's economy to the rest of the world (Yeh 1993). Chuang (2013:3), for example, notes that "[B]etween 1978 and 2007, the PRC's GDP grew at nearly ten percent a year, which is greater than any other country. China ranks fourth in the world in terms of economic size, next to the USA, Japan, and Germany." This growth has created a situation in

which many new economic opportunities were available to rural Tibetans, such as construction work and other poor-paying, unskilled migrant labor jobs that provided unprecedented access to cash earning.<sup>4</sup>

Most villagers admire the strength of the Chinese economy, while also feeling proud to be Tibetan. They are influenced by TV and movies featuring urban life, and though they admire modern Chinese life, many Tibetans often comment that Han Chinese are obsessed with money, and lack compassion and filial piety.

Economic changes have had drastic impacts on Tibetan areas. According to Wang (2009:5), for example, the Tibet Autonomous Region reported economic growth that at times exceeded the national average. The economic growth rate in 1995, for example, was nearly eleven percent, which was greater than that of China as a whole. Per capita annual income of households increased from 175 RMB (21.36US\$) in 1978 to 1,331 RMB (162.32US\$) in 2000.

One local manifestation of these changes can be seen in locals' participation in the butter trade. Certain Tibetan businessmen from the Bla brang area buy butter from Tibetans in the Bla brang vicinity and transport it to Lha sa to sell in shops staffed by Bla brang Tibetan women. There is a strong demand for butter in Lha sa because it is an essential ingredient in *rtsam pa*, as well as important in providing fuel for lamps, thousands of which are offered daily in Lha sa's many temples; local demand far outstrips production. In A mgon Village (the first author's home village) in A mchog Town, certain adults and their children moved to Lha sa and opened butter shops near monasteries beginning in about 1995. About twenty percent of village households in Mtha' ba Village engaged in the butter business in 2009 with certain family members based in Lha sa.<sup>5</sup> Butter was collected in Bsang chu and neighboring pastoral areas and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.economywatch.com/world-economy-2008.html>, accessed 30 May 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Certain families had done butter business based in Lha sa since at least 1990 and were the wealthiest village families in 2009.

transported to Lha sa, where it was sold for both food and for butter lamps in monasteries.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these economic changes, the increased reach of state education greatly impacts Tibetan society. A China-wide policy of compulsory education (six years of primary school plus three years of junior middle school) for children in urban areas began in 1986. Education as emphasized by the local government stresses that every child be sent to school. The *Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education (jiu nian yi wu jiao yu fa)* established requirements and deadlines for attaining universal education tailored to local conditions and guaranteed school-age children the right to receive at least nine years of education. Nationwide promulgation of the nine-year compulsory education law made enforcement a major responsibility of local government. One way of doing this was through penalties, e.g., a family in Sa dkar Village (near Mtha' ba Village) was forced to pay 2,000 RMB to the local township government for taking a child out of school in 2001. This policy lists the penalty for not complying with the compulsory education law as 1,000-3,000 RMB per child, and was a major factor in most children attending school, a significant break with the tradition of keeping children at home to labor. The vast majority of children now attend school at the primary school level. This is perceived to be a result of the China-wide compulsory education policy.

In 2009, Mtha' ba villagers had accepted the importance of state education. About ninety percent of children finish elementary school and seventy percent of children comply with the nine year compulsory education policy. The village has sixty college graduates, most of whom have jobs as teachers, government bureaucrats, and policemen. Additionally, the traditional dictum that girls should stay at home with their mothers until marriage while boys attended school has changed.

Students are now expected to not only complete middle school,

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<sup>6</sup> In 2009, the purchase price was forty RMB per kilogram in spring, twenty-four RMB per kilogram in summer and autumn, and thirty-six to thirty-eight RMB per kilogram in winter. The selling price was about four RMB per kilogram higher than the purchase price.

but to graduate from university and obtain permanent official jobs. Children who cannot attend college return home to farm, herd, run small businesses, and work in construction. Female dropouts may work as waitresses in winter and do construction work in summer because construction income is much higher than restaurant wages. Despite these alternatives, official government jobs have long been the major reason parents give for sending children to school. If asked, Tibetan parents say the most important reason they send their children to school is for them to find permanent jobs after graduation. Government jobs bring regular monthly salaries that are the basis for a bank loan to buy or build a new home, provide medical care benefits, a retirement income, and the opportunity to make connections with other people in one's workplace that may lead to such advantages as eventual promotion and all the benefits of having social power and influence. Other economic and employment opportunities discussed above are not considered comparable to the benefits of being a lifetime government employee

Furthermore, students who perform poorly, and their families, are less admired than families who have students who do well in school.

Of particular relevance to this study is the school experience exposing a student to young people from many different Tibetan areas, most of whom do not observe hair-changing rituals. Such rituals are often labeled *rjes lus* 'backward'. Young locals believe that such rituals are not done outside the Tibetan world and think that hair-changing has little meaning. Many schoolgirls thus do not wish to have a hair-changing ritual, in fear of being labeled backwards or *srol rgyun* 'traditional'. Though villagers' ancestors observed the ritual, many young girls today feel that it is unrelated to modern youth, focused on educational and economic success, as well as government employment.

Passing the university entrance exam is the focus and goal of twelve years of education (six years of primary school, three years of junior middle school, and three years of senior middle school) because it assures the student a place at a university and ultimately, parents believe, a secure government job. Students begin preparing for this exam in grade one of senior middle school. Most students

turn seventeen years old when they reach grade two or three in senior middle school. Winter and summer holiday classes are held with the goal of helping students score higher on the entrance exam. This singular focus on doing well on this exam is understandable because it creates better employment prospects and also improves the reputation of a family whose child excels in the exam. This focus of time and energy detracts from the importance of anything like hair-changing rituals.

In the past, expending resources on a daughter during the hair-changing ritual might have brought her a more secure future through attracting a wealthier family with an unmarried son. The only hope for a woman to have a successful life was through her husband and his family; the richer the better. Today, however, it is possible to secure a livelihood by passing the university entrance exam, graduating with a university degree, and obtaining a permanent job.

School culture also stresses the acquisition of knowledge and admiration of popular singers and movie stars, who are often Han Chinese. School is a place where new ideas are encountered and a place for children to distance themselves from traditional life and norms, e.g., such school activities as modern dancing and singing performances are deemed much more attractive than such rituals as hair-changing.

Televisions and videodiscs have introduced information to the village that is unprecedented and is profoundly impacting villagers. Williams and Williams (2003:1) noted that, "it is often said that television has altered our world." In the same way, local people often speak of a new world, a new society, and a new phase of history being created and brought about by this technology. TV sets are the source of both national and international news and have introduced new topics into daily discourse between villagers. Conflicts between neighboring villagers, who was marrying whom, and the prices of livestock were main topics before the 1990s. Now, every Mtha' ba household has a television and the content of conversation has expanded to include national and international news.

Young villagers are deeply affected by television shows,

especially such romantic series as *Ta hui ai ni de* 'He Might Love You'. Not only do ideas presented in such shows challenge traditional ideas about love and marriage, but young people are also strongly attracted to new fashions, modern hairstyles, and hair coloring. Even ways of walking and talking are evaluated on a scale of coolness. Furthermore, modern media often stresses success emanating from a spirit of nonconformity and independence, another strong break from local Tibetan traditions that emphasize obedience to family, clan, and elders and identity based on community and religion.

Videos of popular Western and Chinese songs and dances are easily available in DVD format in shops within a few hundred meters of the village in Bla brang Town. A young Tibetan who had never heard of Michael Jackson (1959-2009) was nowhere to be found in 2009. Similarly, the Chinese singer, A du (b. 1973), from Fujian was very popular in the village in 2002, especially his song "Tibetan Girl" (sung in Chinese). Tibetan singer, Kun dga', from the Kham Tibetan region, sings in both Chinese and Tibetan, and was also very popular. The reach and power of modern songs may be most obvious in the English rendition of the song "Take Me to Your Heart" in the version sung by the Danish group, Michael Learns to Rock, which was highly popular in the Bla brang area in 2005-2006. These songs provide models that are considered far more attractive than traditional songs. In the realm of dance, traditional Tibetan dances are now rarely performed, whereas Western break dancing is a common form of entertainment in clubs and bars in Bla brang Town, and is also seen in the Bla brang Tibetan Middle School when students give performances.

In the 1990s, telephones came to Mtha' ba Village and every household had a landline in 2009. In some village households, nearly every family member has their own cell phone. Such large numbers of phones have reduced visiting and the need to send word-of-mouth messages to other families and villages with news of, for example, a wedding, a child's first birthday party, or a hair-hanging celebration.

Likewise, cars and motorcycles that villagers own or have easy access to have given them the ability to quickly travel to destinations that even two decades ago were considered hard to reach and were rarely visited. This has also brought greater awareness of the outside



world.

All of this new technology sparkles with beguiling promises of wealth and modernity, in sharp contrast to what villagers often see as outdated, uninteresting, and 'backward' local traditions. In this context of rapid change and the loss of many vernacular traditions, two aspects of local society that have persisted, however, are concepts of competition and reputation.

#### REPUTATION AND COMPETITION IN TIBETAN CONTEXTS

Competition is deeply embedded in many cultures, as noted by Mead (1937) in her collection of studies focusing on competition, cooperation, and independence. A classic example of competition is the Potlatch, a feast among Kwakiutl Indians on the North Pacific coast of North America. It was a venue for competition (to display wealth) and also to enhance one's reputation, obtained when the host lavished every guest with gifts in the form of the family's personal belongings, sometimes resulting in the bankruptcy of the family (Gudeman 2001). Though such extremes of conspicuous consumption are unknown in Mtha' ba, hair changing celebrations have a similar role – to display wealth and gain prestige. Competition is integral to Tibetan culture, with families displaying their wealth (and 'modern' status) with TV sets, DVD players, telephones (land lines and cell phones), electric milk separators, refrigerators, trucks, cars, and motorcycles.

Villagers compete to improve their reputation, locally expressed through the term *ming*. Amdo Tibetans typically employ two terms for reputation – *ming* and *snyan grags*. Comprised of the terms 'hear/ listen' and 'resound', *snyan grags* refers to the fame of individuals, and literally means something like 'resounding word/ news'. The *snyan grags* of individuals is said to *khyab pa* 'flourish' or *rgyas pa* 'spread' – it can be thought of as a quality emanating from a person. *Snyan grags* may be described as *che ba* 'large' but not *chung ba* 'small'. *Snyan grags* is always positive, and is applied typically to religious figures who are considered highly virtuous, efficacious, or

both. Such people are outstanding, atypical individuals.

By contrast, everyone has a *ming* 'name'. One's *ming* derives from the *ming* of one's family – it is corporate in nature to the extent that all members of a *khyim tshang* 'family' share the same *ming* regardless of their individual character. *Ming* is furthermore inter-generational, applying not just to a synchronic family, but also to diachronic *khyim rgyud* 'family lineage'. Unlike *snyan grags*, *ming* may be either positive or negative. A positive *ming* is described as *hra gi* 'good' or *drang gi* 'straight', while negative *ming* are 'not good' and 'not straight', though a family or household lineage may, rarely, be called *tsog gi* 'dirty/ bad'. The potentially negative, inter-generational nature of *ming* is demonstrated in the following account:

X's family is considered to have a bad reputation in his village. His father was a thief who often stole from other villagers. Over time, villagers began to distrust the family. Now, X has inherited his father's personality. He is a trickster who often does not participate in communal activities and is thought to lack compassion. For example, if a villager dies, he will not join the funeral. For this reason, if his family encounters difficulties, other villagers do not help them. Because of this bad reputation, X was also unable to find a wife until he was thirty years old. He is now seriously ill, and no villagers assist him.

This account also demonstrates that the basis for a family lineage's *ming* is largely ethical – a good, straight *ming* accrues to households whose members are honest and compassionate.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, wealth is also taken into consideration – a prosperous household is almost always considered to have a good, straight *ming*.

Hair changing ceremonies are venues for competition between families and a chance for them to demonstrate their *ming*. Attendees evaluate the ceremonies on the basis of:

- ornaments (coral and gold jewelry) and clothing of the new

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<sup>7</sup> The fact that both *ming* and *snyan grags* are largely predicated on Buddhist ethics undermines Samuel's (1993) distinction between 'shamanic' reputation and 'clerical' respectability. The latter is dependent on an absolute scale of judgment derived from Buddhist ethics, and the former is based on a more diverse, flexible, and relative set of criteria.

couple (in the case of a marriage); or of only the girl (in the case of a hair changing ceremony);

- the amount of food, drink, and cigarettes offered to guests;
- the quality/ expense of food, drink, and cigarettes;
- the quality of the entertainment by invited singers, who, if the family spends enough, are locally well known professional singers; and;
- the number of guests and helpers at the ritual.

Increasingly, the major reason for holding hair changing rituals is to display a family's wealth. Such ceremonies are now no longer deemed critical in determining a daughter's future, because education and job opportunities are considered more significant. Consequently, if families cannot afford to compete with richer families, they may not hold a hair changing ceremony. However, given the complex relationship between demonstration and manipulation – holding a sumptuous feast with many guests not only demonstrates but also creates a good reputation – intense competition exists among those who still hold the ritual. In this context, the hair of the girl who comes of age is a critical symbol of the family's reputation, as outlined in the following discussion of the symbolic significance of hair.

## HAIR

The anthropological study of hair, beginning with the psychoanalyst, Berg (1951) is of relevance to this study. Berg argued that the hair unconsciously signified the penis, which led him to conclude that cutting hair, as well as head-shaving by monks and so on, were equivalent to castration. In response to this idea, Leach (1958) suggested that the head represents the penis and head hair represents semen. Long hair therefore, signifies unrestrained sexuality and removing the hair suggests sexual restraint, e.g., castration and celibacy. Hallpike (1969) developed Leach's theory by suggesting that long hair is fundamentally antisocial, whereas cut or dressed hair is

social, and related to living under a certain disciplinary regime within society.

Hallpike's argument is particularly compelling in the context of the Tibetan hair changing ceremony, as it suggests that the girl who undergoes this ritual is now living under a social disciplinary regime – the rules that apply to adult women. Now expected to behave as an adult woman she may not, for example, leave when female children call her to play, or wear clothes haphazardly, i.e., she must dress formally in public. She is also expected to represent her mother at home when her mother is away by serving guests with tea, and cooking and serving them food. Hair changing was very important to the girl especially when it came to her role in the family and decision-making. A girl never participated in family discussions without hair changing, regardless of the merit of her ideas or the strength of her convictions. A girl who had not had the hair changing ritual was forbidden by her parents to develop relationships with members of the opposite sex. She was usually kept at home under family surveillance. But, when she was socially proclaimed an adult through hair changing, she was free to develop relationships with males and could have a boyfriend, leading to engagement. She had freedom to choose the boy, but sought her parents' opinion. She was not prevented from having more than one boyfriend. However, the family might have suggested a boyfriend and planned an engagement if the girl agreed.

In the Tibetan context, hair serves as a potent symbol for this regime of social control for several reasons.<sup>8</sup> We may note, firstly, that managing hair is a way of managing fortune and the lifespan. For example, people do not wash their hair in the afternoon, as this would shorten the lifespan. People also avoid washing their hair before exams, as this also washes away one's knowledge. Washing hair after receiving a blessing on the head from a *bla ma* is also thought to wash away the blessing. Washing hair on the fifth day of the fifth

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<sup>8</sup> The third author, a Tibetan college student, collected the following information presented here from classmates who come from across the Tibetan Plateau. While not all this information applies to this study's focal village, it provides useful background on the significance of hair in a broader Tibetan context.

month is also avoided, as water is considered poisonous on this day. Hair is, however, especially washed on the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth lunar month as this day is associated with King Ge sar's wife 'Brgu mo. Finally, white strands of hair, especially in young people's hair, are considered a sign of good luck, and are, therefore, never plucked, though they may be dyed black.

Within Buddhist contexts, hair also has significance as a store of tantric power and a vehicle for expressing compassion. Strong (2004), for example, discusses how relics of the Buddha, including hair, have come to be venerated. In the discussion of hair, Strong provides a multitude of examples of what hair means in the Buddhist context. The long, uncut braid of *sngags pa/ dpon* 'tantrists' is used to create powerful protective amulets, and smelling a *bla ma's* burning hair is said to prevent illness. Folklore from many locations throughout Amdo also relates how the hair cut from a monk magically grew into a forest, for example, Tsong kha pa's hair is said to have grown into a forest at Bya khyung Monastery. Finally, one of the reasons offered as to why monks shave their head is that it demonstrates compassion – keeping long hair would attract lice that would need to be killed.

These associations of hair with compassion and tantric power relate solely to males, however. For females, associations with hair are primarily concerned with controlling pollution and bad luck. Furthermore, though most of these associations apply also to men, they are expressed as being solely female concerns. Women are thus advised not to comb their hair at night, as this brings ghosts to a household. Women are also not allowed to comb their hair in front of the household shrine. Combing hair towards the sun also brings bad luck to a household. Hair may not be discarded haphazardly, for example, in Khri ka, it is believed that women will be punished after death by having to pick up discarded hairs one by one. Bkra shis bzang po (2012) describes how discarded hair is thought to cause mental and physical illness in a Nyag rong Mi nyag Tibetan Village. Women must also be careful to wear their hair correctly. Short hair is considered ugly in traditional contexts – the longer the hair the better. Such hair must be dressed, however. It is not worn loose even after

washing, immediately after which it must be braided or tied in a ponytail. To do otherwise is considered a sign of moral and sexual looseness. In fact, family members examine a woman's hair after she ties it; stray hairs are considered, in certain regions, sign of bad luck, whereas in other areas, stray hairs indicate that guests will come.

These examples illustrate that hair is a potent, multivalent symbol in Tibetan contexts, related to prosperity, fortune, compassion, and tantric power. Women's hair, and its control, is typically associated with the management of pollution and bad luck, thus giving a female's hair-changing rich ritual significance.

## CONCLUSION

In addition to expanding the small corpus of scholarly articles on ritual related to Tibetan women's hair, these materials demonstrate the complexity of contemporary cultural change on the Tibetan Plateau. State education and mass media have resulted in many locals, particularly youths, considering such vernacular practices as hair changing rituals to be 'backwards'. Meanwhile, involvement in the rapid expansion of the market economy has resulted in certain families abandoning increasingly expensive hair changing rituals. More income has provided new opportunities for expressions of traditional idioms of reputation and competition. Celebratory gatherings, such as girls' hair changing rituals, are occasions on which a family's reputation can be both displayed and manipulated. Hair changing rituals are particularly potent occasions for displaying and manipulating reputation because of the important symbolism of hair, particularly women's hair, in Tibetan contexts. The importance of women's hair as a symbol of a family's reputation has thus now been intensified for families who still hold the ritual, but greatly reduced for those who do not. These materials thus demonstrate the role of decisions made by individuals and families in the process of cultural alterations, as attitudes and priorities regarding progress, prosperity, and reputation collectively impact the maintenance and discontinuation of local traditions. Such decisions and decision-making processes deserve further study. Finally, this study

demonstrates how vernacular rituals provide rich ground for examining and understanding the losses and continuities brought about by rapid economic change on the Tibetan Plateau.

FIGURES

The photographs below were taken in August of 2009 in Mtha' ba Village by Blo bzang tshe ring. The clothing, decorations, and hairstyle depicted in the photos were worn by the young woman during her hair changing ritual.













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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Brug mo skyid འབྲུག་མོ་སྐྱིད།

A

A du 阿杜

A mchog ཨ་མཚོག

A mgon ཨ་མགོན།

B

Bkra shi lhun po བཀྱ་ཤི་ལུན་པོ།

Bkra shis bzang po བཀྱ་ཤིས་བཟང་པོ།

Bla brang ལྷ་བྲང་།

Blo bzang tshe ring ལྷོ་བཟང་ཚེ་རིང་།

Bsang chu བསང་ཆུ།, Xiahe 夏河

Bsang khog བསང་ཁོག

Bya khog བྱ་ཁོག

C

che ba ཆེ་བ།

Chu sngon ཆུ་སྟོན།

chung bo ཆུང་བོ།

D

Deng Xiaoping ཌེང་ཧྲེ་པིང་།

Dga ldan དག་ལ་ལྷན།

Dge lugs pa དགེ་ལུགས་པ།

Don 'grub sgrol ma དོན་འགྲུབ་སྟོལ་མ།

drang gi རྟང་གི།

F

Fujian 福建

G

Gannan 甘南, Kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།

Gansu 甘肅, Kan su'u ཀན་སུ་ཁུ།

go dmar གོ་དམར།

gro ma གྲོ་མ།

Gtsos གཙུག་པོ།

H

*hra gi* རྩ་གི  
Huanghe 黄河  
Hui 回

J

*jiunian yiwu jiaoyu* 九年义务教育

K

*Ka chu* ཀ་ཚུ། Linxia 临夏  
*Kan lho* ཀན་ལྷོ།, Gannan 甘南  
*Kan su'u* ཀན་སུ་ཁུ།, Gansu 甘肃  
*kha btags* ཁ་བརྟག་ས།  
*Khams* ཁམས།  
*Khri ka* ཁྲི་ཀ།  
*khyab pa* ཁྱེད་པ།  
*khyim rgyud* ཁྱིམ་རྒྱུད།  
*khyim tshang* ཁྱིམ་ཚང་།  
*Klu chu* ལུ་ཚུ།  
*Ko tshe* ལོ་ཚེ།  
*Kun dga'* ལུང་དགེལ།

L

*Lha sa* ལྷ་ས།, Lasa 拉萨  
*Li thang* ལི་ཐང་།  
*Lo sar* ལོ་སར།

M

*mar khu* མར་ཁུ།  
*Mi nyag* མི་ཉག།  
*ming* མིང་།  
*Mtha' ba* མཐའ་བ།  
*Mtsho lho* མཚོ་ལྷོ།  
*Mtsho sngon* མཚོ་སྔོན།, Qinghai 青海  
*mu* མུ།

N

*Nyag rong* ཉག་རོང་།

P

*phrug* ཕུག།

Phug sde ཕུག་སྡེ།

Q

Qingdao 青 島

R

Rgan rgya རྒྱན་རྒྱ།

rgyas pa རྒྱལ་པ།

Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

RMB Renminbi 人民币

rtsam pa རུས་པ།

S

Sa mtsho skyid ས་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།

Se ra སེ་ར།

Shaanxi 陕 西

Shar lung ཤར་ལུང་།

skor bro སྐོར་བོ།

skra སྐྱ།

skra phab སྐྱ་ཕབ།

skra sla ma སྐྱ་སྤྲ་མ།

Sku 'bum སྐུ་འབུམ།, Ta'er 塔 尔

snyan grags སྐྱེན་གྲགས།

Stag rig སྐྱག་རིག།

T

Ta hui ai ni de 他会爱你的

Tshe dpal rdo rje ཚེ་དཔལ་རྡོ་རྗེ།

tsog pa ཙོག་པ།



## LITERATURE



## A COLLEGE STUDENT

'Phrin las nyi ma (Chenli Nima;  
Xi'an International Studies University)

A friend told me his friend's experience studying in Chengdu, which typifies higher education for many young Tibetan men studying in such cities as Xining, Lanzhou, and Chengdu who, for the first time, are away from the close supervision of relatives and teachers.

### BEGINNINGS

The morning of the day Dpal 'bum first started for Chengdu City, his mother, Mtsho mo, got up earlier than usual and prepared food. His stepfather, whom he called Uncle Bzang kho, had also risen and stepped to the back of the room where he burned the leaves of an aromatic plant to beseech the deities for blessings, particularly hoping that Dpal 'bum would successfully graduate in two years. Bzang kho awakened Dpal 'bum and told him to have breakfast, which included beef, bread, and milk tea – a common Tibetan meal. Bzang kho said, "Dpal 'bum, I found a school for you to study at, where you can realize the dream you tell us about everyday. Pack up after you finish eating."

Dpal 'bum was so excited by this unexpected announcement that he could hardly believe it. He gazed at his mother, who silently nodded yes. Suspicion erased from his mind, he darted into his bedroom and hurriedly packed a bag. Bzang kho and Mtsho mo smiled at the dining table. After a few minutes Dpal 'bum rushed out of his room and shouted, "Look, I'm ready!" Bzang kho took some money from his safe, handed it to Dpal 'bum, and said, "Take care of yourself, kid!"

Dpal 'bum's mother was almost in tears as she carried her son's bag. As mother and son walked to the bus stop, she repeatedly urged him to take care of himself, chant mantras and scriptures on the way, and work hard in school. Dpal 'bum nodded, got on the bus, and left, saying, "Good bye, Mother!"

Because there was no direct regular bus from Pad ma<sup>1</sup> County Town to Chengdu, he first took a bus to Rnga ba County Town.<sup>2</sup> He found a seat by a Tibetan woman who sat by a window, but they had no conversation. Time ticked by as Dpal 'bum dozed, listened to music on his MP3 player, and looked out the window. Four hours later, Dpal 'bum reached Rnga ba County Town. He disembarked, purchased a bus ticket to Chengdu the next day, found a cheap inn, and spent a quiet night alone.

He started off again the next morning. Nearly a day was required to reach Chengdu. In the evening, Mtsho mo's cell phone rang. It was Dpal 'bum, announcing that he had reached Chengdu, and had decided to find the school the next morning. Dpal 'bum's mother felt relieved.

It was a sunny September morning when Dpal 'bum woke the next day and put on his Tibetan robe. He was soon walking through the gate of his new school, Southwest University for Nationalities. A booth by the road leading from the gate was for new students who were told what to do. Dpal 'bum filled out a form and paid his tuition and registration, and then the clerk took him and some other new students to their dormitory and classroom, and showed them around the school. The class advisor held a class meeting that evening to familiarize the students with each other and the university. Dpal 'bum sat by Rdo rje, who was from Dkar mdzes Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Rdo rje was eager to know everything and Dpal 'bum was easygoing. They soon became close friends. Dpal 'bum had spent a busy day and his mother and stepfather were sincerely happy when he reported this in the evening.

## THE FIRST TWO MONTHS AT UNIVERSITY

The new semester began with two weeks of military training. Dpal 'bum and Rdo rje were both assigned to the same class. PLA soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> Pad ma County is located in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province.

<sup>2</sup> Rnga ba County is located in Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

came to the school to teach the new students. Wearing newly issued camouflage uniforms, Dpal 'bum had few breaks and little time for meals. Furthermore, the sweltering temperatures of Chengdu City made Dpal 'bum think he would die of heat exhaustion. He and Rdo rje headed to their dorm or cafeteria after training, utterly spent. They felt thoroughly liberated when the training finished two weeks later. Both of them had chosen the challenging subject of Tibetan history as their major. In fact, Dpal 'bum could attend school not because of an exam score, but because his stepfather had bribed the appropriate officials. On account of his lower level of knowledge, he was far behind the others in his class. Actually, he could hardly understand what the teachers said.

Dpal 'bum resolved to study hard and with Rdo rje's help, Dpal 'bum's Tibetan improved to the extent that he could write short poems. He sent one of his creations to a Chengdu publisher who printed it in an anthology, and sent him a complimentary copy.

Dpal 'bum was exultant and decided to treat Rdo rje that night to celebrate. They went out and found a cheap restaurant. While sitting in the corner, a voice told them to not order. It was Nyi ma from Dkar mdzes. He had played basketball with Dpal 'bum the day before and now was with two other Tibetans, enjoying a fancy dinner and drinking beer. Dpal 'bum and Rdo rje were compelled to join them, as custom dictated. Dpal 'bum then enjoyed not only a wonderful meal but also drank beer with them. All of them, except Rdo rje, were drunk after several bundles of beer, which made Rdo rje uneasy. He asked Dpal 'bum to return to school several times, but he refused. Finally, Rdo rje helped Dpal 'bum to their dorm at midnight without saying goodbye to the others.

Dpal 'bum was very drunk, and as they stumbled back to the dormitory building, Dpal 'bum boasted that he had become a famous poet. "Rdo rje, you must buy me a bottle of beer, otherwise I won't move," said Dpal 'bum in a quavering voice, rolling on the ground. Rdo rje was annoyed but did as Dpal 'bum demanded. Later, when they finally staggered into their dorm room, Rdo rje kindly helped Dpal 'bum to his bed, took the empty bottle from his hand, undressed him, and put him to sleep.

At midnight, Rdo rje woke up with a raging thirst. He saw

Dpal 'bum was out of his bed and urinating in the toilet. He wasn't worried, because he knew Dpal 'bum was conscious. Rdo rje drank a cup of water and resumed sleeping. The next day at around noon, Rdo rje found Dpal 'bum still in bed and realized that Dpal 'bum was still drunk. Rdo rje woke him up and told him it was now afternoon. Though he had missed four classes that morning, Dpal 'bum thought it was worth it for he had had a good time with Nyi ma and the others. After finishing lunch in the school cafeteria, Dpal 'bum and Rdo rje studied together in the classroom.

Later, Nyi ma called and invited Dpal 'bum and Rdo rje to a bar to drink. Rdo rje refused, but Dpal 'bum accepted the invitation. They drank, danced, and sang. That night, Nyi ma's girlfriend, Sgron ma, had also come. She spoke Tibetan mixed with Chinese. In time, Dpal 'bum and Nyi ma became close friends, often cut classes, and spent an increasing amount of time together outside the university. Rdo rje knew how Nyi ma behaved in their home place and advised Dpal 'bum not to associate with him but, whenever he did, Dpal 'bum scolded him.

#### DPAL 'BUM'S GIRLFRIEND

Dpal 'bum felt unhappy and lonely at being single. Nyi ma realized that Dpal 'bum was depressed and suggested he find a girlfriend. In the beginning, Dpal 'bum was too shy to agree, though he was extremely eager. Nyi ma's persistent persuasion led Dpal 'bum to agree and Nyi ma then brought a girl with Sgron ma to the school playground where Dpal 'bum and Rdo rje were playing basketball. Sitting on the ground, Nyi ma shouted for Dpal 'bum to join them. Dpal 'bum stopped playing and ran to Nyi ma after ensuring he had been called. Dpal 'bum tried to hide his curiosity and bashfulness. "Who is she?" Dpal 'bum murmured in Nyi ma's right ear.

"She's the one I want to introduce you to," Nyi ma replied lightly.

Sgron ma broke in, and said, "This is my best friend, Zla sgron, who is from Mtsho ngon Province. We're classmates."

Dpal 'bum continued to be shy and nervous, but bravely

managed, "I'm Dpal 'bum, nice to meet you, Zla sgron!" and stretched out his right hand. After they shook hands, Nyi ma and his girlfriend left to give Dpal 'bum and Zla sgron time to become acquainted. This was the first time Dpal 'bum had been introduced to a girl by a matchmaker. While Dpal 'bum was quiet, Zla sgron was easygoing and kindhearted. Dpal 'bum immediately fell head over heels in love with her. She asked Dpal 'bum about his hometown and past, but asked no questions about their future relationship, which made him feel anxious.

He then courageously asked, "Do you have a boyfriend now?" Zla sgron felt taken aback and wondered why Dpal 'bum asked this.

"No!" she said, not looking at Dpal 'bum's face.

Dpal 'bum did not pursue this answer but moved closer to Zla sgron and began chatting. She took her cell phone from her trousers' pocket and switched it off. Soon Dpal 'bum's earlier reticence had vanished and they were sitting close to each other and chatting nonstop.

As darkness fell, Nyi ma and Sgron ma approached from a distance. Dpal 'bum stood, looked at the school gate, and noticed them. He asked Zla sgron for her phone number, wrote it down, and said, "Would you like to be my girlfriend now?" She silently lowered her head in embarrassed consent.

By this time, Nyi ma and Sgron ma had arrived and suggested they go to a bar for a drink. They then took a taxi to a fancy bar where Nyi ma and Dpal 'bum were regulars. After Zla sgron had several cups of liquor, she was confused, kissed Dpal 'bum's cheek, put an arm around his neck, and said, "I want you to protect me. I hope you'll give me some proof of your love." These words were as though carved on Dpal 'bum's half-drunk heart.

#### DPAL 'BUM'S HOLIDAY PLAN

The winter holiday was drawing near and Dpal 'bum was wallowing in an unoccupied, indolent life with his new girlfriend. His teachers told him countless times to prepare for the end-of-term exams, but their words fell on deaf ears. Dpal 'bum's head teacher then decided to

call his parents, but did not when Dpal 'bum promised to pass all his examinations. Dpal 'bum was amazed when he at long last opened his textbook and began reviewing. His books were new and he understood almost nothing. It was as though he had never seen those books before.

Two days before the exams, Dpal 'bum had no other choice but to make cheat sheets, and passed the exams by using them. Reporting his scores to his family over the phone, Dpal 'bum asked for a reward from his stepfather. Bzang kho and Mtsho mo were delighted with the news, put 800 *yuan* in Dpal 'bum's bank account the next day, and then waited hopefully for Dpal 'bum's return. Dpal 'bum was not satisfied with the amount of his reward because he wanted to buy an expensive cell phone for his girlfriend as a birthday gift, but he could not afford it. He decided to take a part-time job and so he asked for work at the bar where he and Nyi ma often drank. The proprietor knew Dpal 'bum and his friends often frequented his bar and arranged a night job as a waiter that paid twelve *yuan* an hour. Gradually Dpal 'bum was absorbed in his work and did not want to return home during the winter holiday. He phoned home and said, "I won't return. I registered for a training class to improve my Chinese." The seriousness of Dpal 'bum's tone moved his parents who agreed that Dpal 'bum should stay in Chengdu. Meanwhile, he continued working in the bar.

#### NEW YEAR'S DAY

Two days before the Tibetan New Year, the house decorations and food preparations were done. The only thing Dpal 'bum's mother couldn't do was set off firecrackers, as in most A mdo Tibetan places, firecrackers are set off by men. Bzang kho had left to make purchases. Mtsho mo then persuaded Dpal 'bum to return to set off firecrackers.

On New Year's Eve, Bzang kho returned home with many items, including an expensive warm sheepskin robe for Dpal 'bum as a New Year gift. Dpal 'bum had never owned a wool robe in his life. On New Year's Eve, wrapped in his new robe, Dpal 'bum and his family put out the food they had, covering the table with mutton,



beef, pork, meat dumplings, fried bread, and many kinds of fruit on wooden plates. They then enjoyed a delicious meal of meat dumplings. The traditional way of celebrating the New Year had gradually become Chinese in the place where they lived. Most local Tibetans did not sleep that night because they believed that the New Year began at exactly midnight, when everyone started visiting, which Dpal 'bum had little interest in. Instead, he stayed at home and helped greet visitors. Many of Bzang kho's workmates came to visit and drank Chinese liquor. One of Bzang kho's friends asked Dpal 'bum to drink with them, but Mtsho mo and Bzang kho said he should not. They thought Dpal 'bum had never touched liquor or smoked. Bzang kho and his visitors drank until dawn while Dpal 'bum and Mtsho mo served them.

#### DPAL 'BUM'S PLEDGE

In late winter, the sun shone in the lofty sky and the weather was warming, hinting at spring's approach. Dpal 'bum's family was enjoying the sunshine on their verandah one day after finishing a good lunch. Dpal 'bum's cell phone rang and his friend A du asked him to play basketball on the local primary school playground. As he was leaving, Mtsho mo asked him curiously who had invited him. Dpal 'bum's mother had repeatedly told him to avoid bad friends. Dpal 'bum didn't tell her it was A du, a man Dpal 'bum's age who had been expelled from school, and disowned by his parents for unforgiveable behavior. Dpal 'bum hastily said, "It was one of my schoolmates," and then hurried away.

A du and others were already playing basketball with some monks from Rnga ba County as Dpal 'bum reached the playground. A few hours later the intense competition was over, and Dpal 'bum and A du had lost. Most players left because of impending darkness. Only Dpal 'bum and A du remained on the playground. A du handed Dpal 'bum a cigarette and took another for himself. That was the first time Dpal 'bum had smoked during the holiday for he was regarded locally as an upright student. They were exhausted and lay on the side of the basketball court. After a while A du took Dpal 'bum to a bar near the

school, and asked him to drink. Dpal 'bum found it hard to refuse.

Hours passed, and Dpal 'bum decided that his mother would surely have gone to bed, and so returned home. He was conscious that he had drunk more than A du. He noiselessly slowed and entered the home when he got to his home gate. Unexpectedly the light came on and Mtsho mo yelled, "Is it my son, Dpal 'bum?"

Dpal 'bum said nothing, fearing Mtsho mo would smell the beer on his breath. When Mtsho mo approached with his supper, she immediately detected the odor of beer. Tears streamed from her eyes. She knew beating or scolding Dpal 'bum was useless, since he was no longer a boy. Dpal 'bum regretfully tried to persuade her to stop weeping, and finally, Dpal 'bum also wept, embraced his mother, and vowed to stop smoking and drinking.

After a while, Mtsho mo handed Dpal 'bum a bowl of dumplings, and returned to bed.

#### RETURN TO SCHOOL

A new term started with spring's approach. With his pledge to not drink and smoke, Dpal 'bum returned to school for a new beginning. The school had changed Dpal 'bum and Rdo rje's room to another building further from the classrooms. As he unpacked, Dpal 'bum felt confused, because the new dorm was not as comfortable as the previous one. This change made all the students disgruntled. Dpal 'bum led them to the teacher in charge of their class, but nothing could be done. The school said that the building Dpal 'bum and others had stayed in had been designated for new students. Hopelessly, Dpal 'bum and others left, returned to their assigned dormitory, and unhappily settled in.

In the afternoon, Dpal 'bum had forgotten this misfortune, since his girlfriend would soon arrive from Zi ling. Two hours before her train reached the station, Dpal 'bum was already in the waiting room. The day before Zla sgron left Zi ling for Chengdu was her birthday and she had spent the day with her parents. Dpal 'bum had prepared a gift of a cell phone that had cost 2,000 RMB. Originally he had wanted to give it to her on her birthday, but he had been far away

at that time.

Finally, Zla sgron's train arrived, and passengers crowded out the exit. Dpal 'bum held a small wrapped box and carefully looked for Zla sgron. In the crowd of strange moving faces, Dpal 'bum eventually found her, rushed over, and said, "Are you tired from the long trip?" taking her luggage.

"Yes!" she replied, "Let's find a hotel, I want to rest."

Dpal 'bum handed his gift to her and said, "Hope it's not too late to wish you a happy birthday!" She was delighted, embraced Dpal 'bum, and on the way to the hotel, they strolled arm in arm, laughing and joking.

## A LIE

A month passed and winter's frost gave way to warm summer weather. The hot weather in Chengdu City encouraged people to remove their heavy clothes. Wearing a white T-shirt, Dpal 'bum was delighted by the weather, but anxious about the coming weekend's expenditures. He had not planned his allowance well. He attended four hours of Tibetan classes in the morning, and decided to play basketball on an empty stomach. The playground was full of students because the weekend was approaching. Dpal 'bum dashed directly to the basketball court and joined a group of five Han students. After several rounds, Nyi ma and three other boys showed up and joined them. Dpal 'bum had met Nyi ma only several times since the beginning of the term for he had promised his mother that he would not associate with bad students.

"Why haven't you called me recently? Did you forget your friend?" Nyi ma asked Dpal 'bum during a break.

"No, I've been busy with homework," Dpal 'bum replied.

Nyi ma laughed and the others joined in. "You never do homework! Anyway, we will hold a circle dance here in the stadium tomorrow night. I hope you will come with your girlfriend," Nyi ma said, handing him a cigarette.

Dpal 'bum said, "Thanks, but I've quit smoking. I'll be glad to come here tomorrow night," and then he left for his dorm, wondering

how to get money for the next evening. He could only think of lying to his stepfather, and then called Uncle Bzang kho. He told him convincingly that the school had ordered each student to contribute 1,000 RMB.

"Didn't they collect 500 RMB last month?" Uncle Bzang kho asked suspiciously.

"That was a class requirement, but this time our school has demanded this and urged us to do it as soon as possible," Dpal 'bum answered.

Bzang kho was persuaded and said, "OK, I'll put a deposit in your account tomorrow." Dpal 'bum then rushed into his dorm room with a yell that frightened and roused Rdo rje from his afternoon nap. Dpal 'bum then borrowed 200 RMB from Rdo rje with a promise that he would return it the next day. Dpal 'bum's empty stomach was grumbling for he hadn't eaten the whole day. He then called Zla sgron and enjoyed a nice supper with her.

## CIRCLE DANCING

In the late morning of the following day, as sunbeams were warmly flowing through the window into Dpal 'bum's dorm room, he roused from his two-tiered bunk bed and sleepily rubbed his eyes that seemed to have been glued shut with gum. He got up and put on a newly washed suit. He knew that his roommates had already left to study and conduct other personal business. Dpal 'bum walked to the student canteen by himself after washing his hands and face. At the entrance to the student dining hall he accidentally met Zla sgron, who was still in her pajamas, holding a thermos in her right hand and two pieces of bread in a plastic bag in the other hand.

"Dpal 'bum, why are you staring like that?" Zla sgron asked in surprise, waving a hand before Dpal 'bum's eyes.

He jumped as though frightened, and said, "No reason! Have you eaten?" and brushed aside a strand of Zla sgron's hair with his right hand.

Zla sgron munched on a piece of bread and said, "Ha! I am now," smiling cutely. Dpal 'bum took her thermos and led her into

the dining room, because he did not want to eat alone. They headed to Zla sgron's dorm after eating because she needed to put on appropriate clothes for the coming circle dance. Dpal 'bum waited outside the dorm, checking his cell phone. Approximately half an hour later, he was exhausted from waiting. Eventually she emerged wearing sunglasses and approached Dpal 'bum.

"Were you washing your face or your body?" Dpal 'bum asked jokingly, hinting that he had been waiting a long time.

"This is what girls are like!" replied Zla sgron. It was still two hours before the event began. To kill time they walked to a cybercafé near the school and spent time using chat programs and playing computer games. Since Dpal 'bum had parted with Nyi ma and stopped drinking, the Internet bar had become his favorite hangout. He spent most of his allowance on computer games and was now addicted to them. Nyi ma called and they left for school. Many Tibetan students in Tibetan dance robes had made a large circle and were ready to start.

A big fire customarily blazed in the middle of the circle, but this had been replaced by a heavy sound box. The school would not permit a fire. Many dancers and a large audience had gathered. The sound of applause was ceaseless, encouraging Dpal 'bum, Zla sgron, and other dancers. The onlookers, absorbed in the strong rhythm of the Tibetan songs and the dancers' nimble steps, formed a large circle, and tried to learn the steps from the performers. After about two hours, the dancers and bystanders were ready to leave, including Dpal 'bum and Zla sgron. Their smiles proved it had been a happy time.

#### DPAL 'BUM'S MISFORTUNE

Approximately two months into the last semester of studies, students in Dpal 'bum's grade were intensively preparing their graduation theses after nearly two years of study. They would soon leave the university, hopefully with a two-year college degree. One Friday evening, Dpal 'bum was returning to his dorm after eating. When he got to the school gate, he saw Zla sgron there, talking and laughing

with a boy. They were holding hands, and were unaware that Dpal 'bum was observing them. Disappointedly, Dpal 'bum hung back, pretending not to see them, but then his indignation overwhelmed him and he shoved in front of Zla sgron and the boy. "What are you doing here, Zla sgron?" he inquired gravely.

She panicked, not knowing what to say. "Who is he?" Dpal 'bum angrily demanded. Zla sgron still made no response. Tears streamed down Dpal 'bum's cheeks, because Zla sgron dared not look at him, not even so much as a glance. Enraged, Dpal 'bum ripped a necklace that Zla sgron had given him from around his neck, flung it on the ground in front of Zla sgron, and dashed to his dorm. He lay on his bed, wrapped in his quilt so tightly he could hardly breathe. Rolling on his bed again and again, he was unable to think about anything except Zla sgron and that boy. Tears spontaneously streamed from his eyes. It was the first time he had wept over a girl.

Eventually, he decided to go to a bar for a few drinks to ease his pain. When something sad and unbearable happened, alcohol helped him forget. The bar was full of students when he entered. He chose an empty seat in the corner and ordered three bottles of beer. He noticed Nyi ma's girlfriend nearby, drinking by herself, looking unhappy and lonely. She approached Dpal 'bum and greeted him. They sat together and began to share their troubles, as their table became littered with an ever-increasing number of beer bottles. They both vomited at around midnight.

Dpal 'bum then found a hotel near the bar, booked a room, and helped her up to the room. When Dpal 'bum woke up the next morning he found Sgron ma sleeping by him. She was naked. He was embarrassed, dressed, and left without waking her. On the way to his dorm, Dpal 'bum was terribly worried Nyi ma would find out. He suddenly stopped walking and dashed back to the hotel to urge Sgron ma not to tell Nyi ma that she had slept with him. As he rushed into the room, he found Nyi ma there, arguing with Sgron ma. Dpal 'bum quietly backed out and closed the door, alerting Nyi ma. Nyi ma flung open the door, grabbed his shirt collar, and demanded, "What did you do with my girlfriend last night?" He became enraged when Dpal 'bum didn't answer and slammed his fist into Dpal 'bum's face. Sgron ma then grabbed Nyi ma and stopped him from landing more blows.

Dpal 'bum knew Nyi ma had been his best friend at one point and that the mistake was his.

"I am the cause of this. I did it to take revenge. Don't scold him," Sgron ma said, which calmed Nyi ma.

Nyi ma shouted, "Get out! We're no longer friends!"

Sgron ma persuaded Dpal 'bum to leave. Dpal 'bum did not know what to say, so he left, realizing he had lost a good friend and a new lover, and that he had broken his vow.

#### A TEACHER'S CRITICISM

Since that day, gloom and disappointment filled Dpal 'bum's heart and mind. He frequently skipped class, was out at night drinking, and returned the next morning to sleep the whole day in his dorm. Sometimes, he bothered other students when he got drunk and fought with them. He never called his family except when he wanted cash. Everything he did at that time suggested that he had been possessed by a demon.

Late one night, Dpal 'bum was returning to his dorm. He could hardly walk because of his drunkenness, though he was entirely conscious. A stranger blocked his path as he reached the corner of his dorm building. He was about Dpal 'bum's height, bumped into Dpal 'bum, and then inquired sharply, "Why are you bumping me?" and fixed his eyes on Dpal 'bum. Everything was hazy and cold. Dpal 'bum strained his eyes, but did not recognize the man.

"You bumped into me, man!" Dpal 'bum replied after a long pause.

The man grabbed Dpal 'bum's neck with one hand and said, "Let's see how brave you are!" and punched Dpal 'bum in the belly. Dpal 'bum fought back and, as they rolled on the ground, two men dashed up from behind. One struck Dpal 'bum's forehead with a half a brick. Dpal 'bum fell unconscious and the men fled. After he regained consciousness, he stood, realized that one of his shoes was missing, and started hopping about in search of the missing shoe. His forehead was unbearably painful and gushing blood, so he wrapped his jacket around it. He gave up searching for his shoe and continued

to his dorm. A flashlight shone on him, dazzling his eyes.

An old man, a school guard, approached, wrapped in a huge green military coat. "What are you doing here?" the guard asked Dpal 'bum in Sichuan Chinese dialect.

Dpal 'bum turned and replied, "Nothing! It's OK!" The old man was worried when he saw blood soaking the jacket around Dpal 'bum's head, and convinced Dpal 'bum to go to a nearby hospital. "Let me help you to the hospital," the guard said in a kind voice. Dpal 'bum refused at first, but eventually accepted the old man's assistance, as the increasing pain made him vomit. Dpal 'bum returned to his dorm room from seeing a doctor with his head wrapped in white gauze and went directly to bed.

In the afternoon when students had finished their morning classes, Rdo rje, rushed into the room and awakened Dpal 'bum, who sat up and touched his injured head. The wound was no longer as painful as before. "How is your head? Teacher Bsod noms ordered me to bring you to his office," Rdo rje said in concern. Teacher Bsod noms was Dpal 'bum's favorite teacher and his class's head teacher. He was kindhearted and regarded all his disobedient students with profound patience.

"This time I will be scolded," Dpal 'bum thought on the way to the office. He hung back as he reached the office, feeling afraid. Then Teacher Bsod noms appeared in the hall with a cup of boiled water. "Haven't seen you for a long time, Dpal 'bum. Come in," Teacher Bsod noms said as Dpal 'bum stood still, his head bent, standing rigidly at the door. Dpal 'bum followed. "What happened to you? You're getting worse and worse!" Teacher Bsod noms shouted and turned to Dpal 'bum so suddenly that Dpal 'bum was frightened. Teacher Bsod noms's voice became louder and louder as if announcing to all in the hall that he was scolding Dpal 'bum. The criticism lasted for almost half an hour and his tone slowly became gentler and slower. "The school was going to dismiss you, but I stopped them. Now you can go," said Teacher Bsod noms. Disappointment filled his face.

Dpal 'bum started to leave without knowing what to do, tears streaming down his face. "Dpal 'bum, you only have one month left and this better not happen again. I'm watching you," Teacher Bsod



nams added seriously. Dpal 'bum appreciated this show of concern, and left.

#### THE FINAL EXAMINATION

The sun had vanished behind ominous clouds, taking a break from warming the city. The air took on the feel of rain. Dpal 'bum snored, wrapped in a thin blanket. His other roommates had departed for their classroom early to nervously prepare for the final examination. When it was the time for breakfast, Rdo rje returned to his dorm room with some bread and a thermos full of boiled water. "Sleepy Dpal 'bum, get up!" said Rdo rje jokingly. "You'll be late if you continue sleeping. I've brought you some bread."

Dpal 'bum stuck his head out of the blanket, and rolled over in bed. "What time is it, Rdo rje?" Dpal 'bum asked, reluctantly raised his head, and then walked to the toilet wearing only his underwear.

"We have only thirty minutes!" replied Rdo rje when Dpal 'bum returned. Dpal 'bum put on a fashionable jacket with many pockets, and combed his hair. "Let's go. I'll eat this bread on the way," said Dpal 'bum hurriedly. They went downstairs and headed to the teaching building where examinees were crowded at the gate. "What's the first subject?" inquired Dpal 'bum, his mouth half full of bread.

"Tibetan. Good luck on your test!" replied Rdo rje, murmuring scriptures. Invigilators were already at the gate. After sternly announcing the rules of the test, they unbolted the door. Rdo rje and Dpal 'bum were separated in different examination rooms, which annoyed Dpal 'bum. He found his seat. Everything was so silent that he could hear his heart throbbing. Two teachers invigilated each examination room, and one of them declared the start of the test after handing out the papers. Dpal 'bum was frightened by the difficulty of the test, and began regretting not reviewing. He had arrogantly expected that the Tibetan test would be no challenge for him, especially since he had published a poem in an acknowledged book. Examinees in the same room were deeply absorbed in the test, which made Dpal 'bum uneasy and impatient. He hoped the time

would pass rapidly.

After the exams, all the examinees, including Rdo rje, were discussing the test in front of the building. "How did you do?" Rdo rje asked Dpal 'bum in concern. Dpal 'bum looked extraordinarily depressed and did not reply.

Rdo rje noticed Dpal 'bum's expression and immediately changed the subject. "Let's go back to the dorm and pack our belongings," said Rdo rje. When they entered their room, the other roommates had already started packing, and were excitedly commenting on how they would soon be back at home. "Don't be depressed," said Rdo rje, putting his arm around Dpal 'bum's shoulder. As Dpal 'bum packed a few clothes into a suitcase, he realized his bookcase had only one book. Depression and remorse filled his heart again. He ascended the stairs to the roof of his dormitory building without finishing packing. Atop the roof, he solitarily recalled everything from the last two years. He could see many students below leaving. Tears flowed down his cheeks, an expression of his sincere regret, but it was too late to change anything.

Three days later, the school announced their scores and praised those who had excelled. Dpal 'bum had failed his exams and was thus unable to get a graduation certificate.

## BACK HOME

The graduates separated in different directions, returning to where they had come from as their schooling ended. Dpal 'bum terminated his college life in deep despair and bitter remorse. He packed all his belongings in a case with two wheels on each side, and trudged to the bus stop pulling it with his right hand. The school atmosphere was tranquil. It seemed as though birds were the main actors in the schoolyard, for the only thing that could be heard was their chirping and the flapping of their wings. Walking along a gravel path to the school gate, he was excited about returning home but, at the same time embarrassed, for he had learned nothing and could not get his graduation certificate. He caught sight of his former girlfriend, Zla

sgron, from the corner of his eye. She was carrying a black bag on her back that was so heavy that it almost touched the ground. Dpal 'bum pretended not to see her, and chose an alternative path to evade her, but she caught up to him at the gate. "Dpal 'bum, are you going home?" Zla sgron blurted out.

He turned without making a response, and saw Zla sgron panting, standing rigidly behind him. The heavy bag on her back and the blazing summer sun made her sweat profusely. "Yeah, what would I do if I didn't return home?" Dpal 'bum replied, his face's dark expression showing he was still angry with her.

She realized how he felt, but the heavy bag on her back prompted her to say, "Could you escort me, if we are going the same way to the bus stop?" She stared at Dpal 'bum emotionlessly.

When Dpal 'bum saw she really needed help, he took her heavy pack, put it on his back, and then silently handed her the handle to his suitcase. They then went to the street to hail a cab. As they stood silently on the curb, a green taxi stopped. Dpal 'bum loaded their luggage in the boot, they clambered into the taxi, and twenty minutes later reached the bus stop. Putting the pack down on the ground, Dpal 'bum said, "Take good care of yourself. I'm leaving."

Zla sgron was embarrassed by this expression of concern and replied, "Please, phone me, I'm sorry about..." but dared not look at Dpal 'bum's face.

"It's finished. No need to mention it," responded Dpal 'bum, without allowing her to complete her last sentence, and left, dragging his suitcase. Tears streamed down Zla sgron's cheeks and plopped on to the pavement, but Dpal 'bum was not there to witness this display of regret.

Dpal 'bum reached his hometown after two days of travel. His mother had come to meet him. "Were there any problems on the way?" she asked. Seeing the wrinkles on her face, he realized that his mother had aged, as if ten years had passed.

"It was a smooth trip," answered Dpal 'bum. He was afraid she would ask about his diploma, since that was the only thing his mother would understand as proving her son had obtained something of value from the school. He entered his home followed by his mother. The walls and ceiling were spotted with dust and smoke

that was darker than before. Nobody had cleaned it, as his mother was not tall enough to reach the ceiling. Dpal 'bum put his luggage in a corner, pleased that his stepfather was not there.

"Mother, where is Uncle?" he asked.

His mother stepped from the kitchen holding two dishes of food and said, "He went to Zi ling for a meeting two days ago and probably won't return today," she said, putting the food on a table, and then headed back to the kitchen for more dishes. His stepfather's absence made Dpal 'bum a bit relaxed and gave him more time to ponder how to explain his disastrous school results. After he finished eating, Dpal 'bum said he was going to see a friend in the county town, and left. His mother was extremely curious about what was in Dpal 'bum's suitcase, and opened it. To her disappointment, she saw neither certificate nor gifts, only a few old clothes, kindling her suspicions. It was almost midnight when Dpal 'bum returned. He gently pushed open the unbolted door, and tiptoed in, trying his best not to awaken his mother. As he reached his bedroom, he found his mother weeping on his bed. He turned on the light and ran to her. She immediately wiped away her tears with her sleeve.

"Mother, what happened?" Dpal 'bum asked quietly, patting her back with his hand.

"It's you! Where is your graduation certificate?" she asked in a quivering voice.

"Mother, I... how did you know?" Dpal 'bum said, then confided everything, except his broken vows. His mother burst into wails, tears falling on her robe like pearl beads.

"Your uncle will be furious," she concluded and left for her bed. Dpal 'bum was again convinced of how much she loved him, since she had not scolded him.

The following day Dpal 'bum cleaned the home from top to bottom to please his mother and his stepfather. The rooms were as clean as new ones. Dpal 'bum and his mother patiently waited for Bzang kho, who arrived in the evening with two of his workmates. He was delighted to see the home so neat and tidy and immediately praised Dpal 'bum, whom he introduced to his companions. He added that he had just graduated from university. His workmates were glad to see Dpal 'bum and suitably impressed that he was a

college graduate. After a while, Uncle Bzang kho asked Dpal 'bum to show them his diploma. Dpal 'bum and his mother were shocked and their faces turned red. Bzang kho pressed Dpal 'bum to bring it quickly. At that moment Dpal 'bum's mother said that he had lost it.

Bzang kho immediately stood and shouted, "What? You lost it. Are you still a child?" This frightened the guests, who unsuccessfully tried to calm him. Dpal 'bum lowered his head, sat on a chair near the TV holding a cup of tea, and listened to his stepfather's criticism with trembling legs. In such an embarrassing situation, the guests left. Uncle Bzang kho's shouts still filled the room as he poured out his disappointment. After about two hours of shouting, Bzang kho was exhausted and hoarse, and then wearily walked to the bedroom he shared with Dpal 'bum's mother.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Phrin las nyi ma འཕྲིན་ལས་ཉི་མ། (Chenli Nima 陈立尼玛)

A du ཨ་དུ།

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

Bsod nams བསོད་ནམས།

Bzang kho བཟང་ཁོ།

Chengdu 成都

Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས།

Dpal 'bum དཔལ་འབུམ།

Lanzhou 兰州

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག།

Mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།

Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།, Qinghai 青海

Nyi ma ཉི་མ།

Pad ma པད་མ།

Qiang 强

Rdo rje རོ་རྗེ།

Rnga ba རྩ་བ།, Aba 阿坝

Sgron ma སྟོན་མ།

Sichuan 四川

Southwest University for Nationalities 西南民族大学

Xi'an International Studies University 西安外国语大学

yuan 元

Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།, Xining 西宁

Zla sgron ཟླ་སྟོན།

## SET FREE BY TRAGEDY

G.yang mtsho skyid (Jianzha County  
Number One Nationalities' Middle School)

I was born in a rural community – Hor Village, Tsho drug (Cuozhou) Township, Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, Qinghai Province, China. I graduated from Qinghai Normal University with a BA in English and Tibetan and then found my current job, teaching English at Jianzha County Number One Nationalities' Middle School. I enjoy writing stories because I think they explore social phenomena in ways that other writing can not. This story is based on a traditional Tibetan woman's life who married according to her parents' arrangement. When struck by disaster, she was first helpless, but eventually broke with tradition and achieved success, creating a comfortable life for herself and her family.

The winter sky was gray and windy. The village was wrapped in the faint smoke that poured from the chimneys of each house. The Yellow River was very blue and calm, even though a harsh wind blew across it. Despite the bad weather, I was excited and couldn't wait to visit Gang skyid from my village, Hor. Gang skyid wasn't famous, beautiful, or rich. She was a farmer, but her life experiences were worth recording and sharing.

I was full of expectations when I went to her home to interview her, but she wasn't there. She was in the *ma Ni* room, so I immediately went there. When I arrived, she was sitting in the sun, spinning a big prayer wheel by pulling a thick, old rope together with other elder women. They were holding the rope tightly as their hands moved up and down rhythmically. Tugged in this way, the huge prayer wheel rotated slowly in front of the women, as though demonstrating the eternal nature of samsara.

Gang skyid nodded slightly and thoughtfully when I asked if I could interview her. I sat down by her with a thankful face and realized her eyes were brimming with tears. I felt my throat become dry as I gazed at her. Her face creased as she closed her eyes, and tears ran down her cheeks. Wrinkles were deeply chiseled in her face, especially her forehead. I wondered how many stories were hidden in those creases. She wiped her tears away with her bony hands and began to share her life story with me.

"I was born in Hor Village. I had nine brothers and sisters. We lived happily with my parents," she began in a trembling voice. Tears welled anew as she recalled the past. I wasn't sure if her tears were from happiness or sadness, but I was convinced that she felt OK mentioning her dead parents.

She started again, "When I was twenty, my sisters and brothers married and left home one by one, leaving only me and my younger brother at home with our parents." She stopped and gazed at me, and said, "Just like me, when you come of age, you must marry and move to another village."

I started to think. Local people typically believe girls must marry, leave their family and their aging parents, and stay in their husband's home, even if they object.

When she saw I had fallen silent, she stroked my hair and said, "Child, don't worry. When I reached twenty, it was time to marry. After I finished working in the fields one day my parents informed me that I had been promised to a family in another village. I felt overwhelmed. I didn't even know the man I would live with for the rest of my life. I really..." she stopped, seemingly hurt by this memory, and then continued. "But I had to agree. I didn't want to disobey my parents." She quickened her speech, as if to avoid that part and said, "I just went there, just..." but she didn't finish her sentence. I also didn't ask her to continue.

We restarted the conversation a few minutes later. Actually, I wanted to ask her to continue immediately, but I couldn't because I felt uncomfortable making more requests. I just looked around, pretending to take interest in things happening nearby.

Realizing that I was waiting for her to continue, she scratched her head a little, shifted her hat, and said "Oh!" but then forgot where she had finished. She smiled at me shyly and asked, "Where were we?"

I answered, "You had decided to go..." but before I finished my answer, she stuck her forehead with her fist and began to talk.

"Oh, look at me, what a stupid old woman I am! That day was a sunny, auspicious day. Everybody rose early. My elder sister braided my hair, and I put on my best Tibetan robe and a coral necklace. I was surrounded by my relatives as I went to the groom's



family..." She continued, describing her wedding as briefly as possible. Then, when she finished, I thought she would continue to talk; instead she fell silent. As I looked at her expression, I got a strange feeling that I shouldn't ask what was next. I just stared at her, silently observing her face.

...

The sun seemed to be in a bad mood that day, sometimes releasing all its sunshine to the earth, but sometimes hiding behind the clouds for long stretches of time. Now it began falling behind the mountains. Such moody weather always caused children to sing for the sun to appear again. Slowly, my memory pulled me back into my childhood.

When I was a young girl, I often herded goats with my younger sister in winter. We collected dung and put it in baskets we carried. Sometimes we put kids in them to carry home, too. The winter weather was capricious – sometimes sunny and sometimes overcast, like today. When we were very cold, we sang together and pleaded with the sun to appear again.

<sup>1</sup>ཨ་མ་ནི་མ་ཤར་ཤར།  
<sup>2</sup>ཤར་གྱི་བུ་མོ་གང་ཐ།  
<sup>3</sup>ནགས་རྩེ་འོག་དུ་འཇུག་ཐ།  
<sup>4</sup>ལག་གི་རྩེ་ཐང་ལ་ལུང་ཐ།  
<sup>5</sup>ཨ་མ་ནི་མ་ཤར་ཤར།

<sup>1</sup>*A ma nyi ma shar shar*  
<sup>2</sup>*shar gyi bu mo grang tha*  
<sup>3</sup>*nags rdza'i 'og tu 'dzul tha*  
<sup>4</sup>*lag gi ja ne thang la lung tha*  
<sup>5</sup>*A ma nyi ma shar shar*

<sup>1</sup>Shine, shine mother sun.  
<sup>2</sup>All the girls are frozen.  
<sup>3</sup>They've run into the forest.  
<sup>4</sup>Their bowls have fallen from their hands.  
<sup>5</sup>Shine, shine mother sun.

When we finished singing, we would look at the sky together, hoping

the sun would reappear.

While I was swimming deeply in this childhood memory, Gang skyid called to me. I quickly stopped reminiscing, and blurted "Oh!"

"What are you thinking about? The sun has begun to set and it's time to go home, but I think we have a little more time to talk before the others leave," she said.

I knew she was worrying about her chores at home. I felt guilty and said, "I'm sorry that I disturbed you. Would you like to continue your story tomorrow?" I was sure that she would agree, but instead she began to talk.

"He and I became a couple," she said, not mentioning her husband's name. Nor did I ask his name, for it is forbidden to mention a deceased person's name. I won't write his name here, out of respect for her and her husband.

She continued, "We had two girls and a boy after we married. Seven years after our marriage, we wanted to build a new house and move out from his parents' home. And..." she stopped, trembling. "We went to get lumber from an old house. While we were inside, the roof suddenly collapsed. I was instantly covered by debris, and had no idea what was happening. I heard my husband calling me..." She stopped again, choking back tears. "He was calling my name," she went on.

"Are you OK?' he asked quietly."

"I answered quickly, 'Yes, I'm fine,' and after freeing myself, pulled the timbers off his back."

"Are you OK?' I asked worriedly."

"He didn't answer. That silence frightened me and nearly stopped my heart from beating. I felt something was wrong. My body began to go numb and cold blood flowed up my spine, making me shudder. I quickly finished moving away the timbers that covered him, and I saw him. He wasn't moving. I used all my strength to shake him, crying out his name. It didn't work. He was gone. My head began swimming. Suddenly, everything went black before my eyes. I felt as if I was falling, falling without hitting the ground. And then I don't remember anything."

"I don't know how long I lay there, but eventually people woke

me. He was gone."

She bit her lip, trying to mask her pain. Finally, she couldn't help herself, covered her mouth with her bony hand, and sobbed.

I wondered, "What would I have done had I been there?"

"Oh, my fate was so terrible," she went on, "But, one thing I couldn't accept was..." she stopped, looked straight at me, her eyes brimming with tears, and said in a strong voice, "His parents accused me of killing him and drove me out of the home."

I was shocked, wondering how they could possibly do that, but I only murmured, "Didn't they know it was an accident?"

She nodded and said, "They had lost their child. It was a calamity for them, but... did they ever think of me? I was suffering like them. I had lost my husband, but... they said..."

The sun had already set and the sky had darkened. Suddenly, a strong wind whirled dust and dry leaves around us. I realized we were both wiping our eyes – was that because we had dust in our eyes or sadness in our hearts?

"It's time to go home, we can talk tomorrow," I said quickly, disrupting her train of thought.

"Yes, that's right. I must go," she said and stood up, shaking dust out of her old robe, which made me cough. I sat quietly without saying goodbye as she left. I stared at her back as it disappeared into the distance.

"How bent her shoulders are," I thought, and then went home.

...

I chatted with my mother that evening when I returned home. I told her what I had heard that day. "I can't imagine why they treated her like that," I said.

Mother nodded and told me the story of a woman from Skyang rgya, the village where she had been born and raised:

This woman married and moved into another village, into a family that treated her terribly. She didn't want to stay there, and tried to divorce her husband, but his family wouldn't agree. At a loss, she started to walk with a stoop, pretending to be disabled, and stayed inside the home all the time. Even though she had made herself useless to her husband's family, they wouldn't

grant her a divorce for three years. By that time, everybody thought she really was disabled.

The day after the divorce, her father joked, "Child, if you can straighten your back, it's time to show us." She then stood up straight and tall, which astounded everyone. Later, she said that if she had stayed stopped over like that for two more months, she really would have become a hunchback.

After Mother finished, she said, "A girl is just like a slave in her husband's home when she marries and moves in."

At that time, I wondered if I should praise such women or... I really didn't know.

Women are sensible and strong. We hide suffering in our hearts, and never boast or show our feelings in public. That's the difference between boys and girls. We don't need to belittle ourselves for being born girls. Although society gives up on us, we can live simply and independently. These thoughts ran through my head that night before I slept.

...

The next day was sunny. The blue cloudless sky was like a mirror showing its radiant color to the earth. The lonely sun hung in the air without its best friends, the clouds. Mischievous children played in the dusty lanes. Some children were comparing the clothes their family had bought them for New Year, while others were counting how many candies they had been given. The fields around the village seemed to be waiting for spring. I was also waiting, waiting to hear more of the old woman's story.

I went to her two-story home. The first floor was made of stone and the second floor of wood. It was a wonderful house. Her grandson and granddaughters were playing in front of the gate. When they saw me, they shouted to their grandmother, informing her a guest was coming.

Gang skyid came rushing out to greet me. She was relaxed, and sighed when she saw me. "You startled me. I haven't prepared the house very well. Please come inside," she said, gently pushing me into a room. It was clean, but she hadn't finished sweeping. She told me that her daughter-in-law had gone to her mother's home and hadn't returned. Her son had gone to visit a relative in another village

and also hadn't come back.

She was thus alone at home with her grandchildren. She began talking as she finished her housework. "My husband's family accused me of killing him and kicked me out. I had no place to go except my natal village. After returning with my three children, we lived with my brothers and sisters, who had their own families, because by then my parents had already gone. Their living conditions were poor, and it was hard for them to feed more mouths. I knew I couldn't stay long and I also didn't want to bother them any more, although they insisted we stay in their home," she said.

"We Tibetans customarily call widows bad names and denigrate them. I knew it would be hard for me to remarry. At the same time, I knew if I didn't remarry, people would also gossip about me. I thought I could take care of the children without a man," she went on.

"I prepared to build a house near the village. I climbed the mountain to cut the lumber for the house. Although it was a man's job, I did it all myself," she said proudly. "Even though it was a small house, we lived there. At that time, cultivating fields was also a problem for me, since my boy was too young to help. Cultivating fields is usually a man's job, but I did it." She suddenly stopped, turned, and nimbly rushed outside. Before I knew what was happening, she was drawing a heavy bucket of water from their family well. I put down my notebook quickly and went over to her.

"Please rest, I'll do it for you," I said.

"No, no. It's hard work for you, but I can do it easily," she said, and pushed me away and poured the water into a tall vat. I knew it was hard work, especially for an old woman, but I didn't insist and stayed where I was. We went inside, sat down, and she continued her story.

"I was very happy living with my children, rather than living in my husband's home, although life was hard," she said, placing a big, red apple in my hands, and gesturing for me to eat. She was so generous, and I wondered how she had overcome the difficulties she faced with everyone in the village scorning her.

"How had she fed her children by herself?" I wondered, biting into the apple.

She smiled and said, "My children married and left, one by one, and the youngest one was left with me. When I saw their happy marriages, I felt content and relaxed. Then after a few years, I moved near the Yellow River before the other villagers moved here. I built a house very easily, because I didn't need to pay for the land," she said with a satisfied look on her face.

When I heard that I felt very confused. "Why?" I asked.

"Because no one cared about the land then, especially the government," she said. I nodded slightly and thought she was very smart.

She continued, "In the past, when Hor Village was still on the mountain, we also had fields here, near the Yellow River. In around 2000, most villages moved near the Yellow River, but I got here first and got the best place for free. I did construction work to earn money with my son, and gradually my family became rich. Later, my son married. He has five children and they all attend school. One is even in university. Then, we moved to Cuogankou, a huge, new village that was settled in around 2005. We built a house there and lived happily."

"There are seven hamlets in Cuogankou. At that time, the government gave fifteen Hor families places to move here. So, I got the chance to move. Now, I don't need to worry about anything. I was actually set free after I left my husband's home. Really, I feel free," she said joyfully.

I felt relaxed and inspired, but I was confused as to why I had such feelings. Then, she began cooking lunch and asked me to eat with her family, but I didn't stay. I was eager to go write up her story, which I had jotted down as she talked. The sun was already high in the sky. The wind that blew on my face and through my hair was gentle, like a spring breeze. Everything was energized. The trees were more tender and the grass greener than before. Sometimes, what seems like a tragedy can actually turn out to be a watershed in our lives, and the beginning of something wonderful. A source of sadness can become a source of strength, and a loss can become an opportunity. I felt I had new courage to face my future.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

Cuogankou 措干口

Cuozhou 措周

G.yang mtsho skyid གཡང་མཚོ་སྒྱིད།

Gang skyid གང་སྒྱིད།

Hor ཧོར།

Jianzha County Number One Nationalities' Middle  
School 尖扎县第一民中

ma Ni མ་ཤི།

Skyang rgya སྐང་རྒྱ།

Tsho drug ཚོ་དུག།





## WHO IS TO BLAME?

Klu rgyal 'bum (Independent Scholar)

I was born in a rural village of Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Qinghai Province. I graduated from Qinghai Normal University in 2011 with a BA in English.

The summer afternoon sun beat down so harshly that everyone underneath felt they were being boiled in a pot. That the sun's heat was destroying the annual crops was a universal complaint, though everyone knew muttering was futile. Only when clouds appeared would anything change. In time, everyone went about their business and complained about the heat less.

I was watching my favorite TV show at home one sweltering afternoon amidst this terrible heat. I felt relaxed and undisturbed. Just after eating one of my younger brother's snacks, I heard a wild cry from outside. Terror rose deep in my heart. I had never heard such an awful cry. I had heard babies crying for their mothers and children sobbing because they had been beaten, but never anything like this. Paralyzed by fear, I felt my heart pounding. My breathing seemed to have stopped. I listened, waiting for something more. Nothing happened. After a bit, I regained my composure, but the thought that something horrible had happened stuck in my mind. I stood slowly. The cry came again and my fear resumed with new intensity. I climbed up the ladder leading to the roof of our house to see what was going on. I saw many people surrounding someone who was crying. I was too far away to see clearly, especially given my bad eyesight, so I climbed down from the roof and ran to the crowd.

A man lay on the ground, his body covered in blood. He had stopped breathing and was as white as a clean bed sheet. His face radiated a sense of intense suffering.

He had been stabbed in the gut with a knife. He was beyond saving – not even the Buddha could have helped him. A woman held him. It was her wild lamentations that I had heard. She cried as though *her* life had ended, ignoring those consoling her. The dead man was her lover. Her eyes communicated that she was overcome

with grief; that even though her parents and friends were still alive, she felt her life was now meaningless with the man's death. Her lover had died, and she did not want to continue alone.

I heard people murmuring that she was crazy. "What a terrible fate those two had," some murmured. There was a long history between the couple that the entire village was privy to. Even children knew it all – Palden and Drolma had loved each other for eight years.

Palden was twenty-six when he died. Drolma was a year younger. Even though most villagers their age were married with two or three children, they had never married because of the long-running feud between their families that had begun when they were children. The two lovers were fully aware of this conflict, but dared love each other anyway.

The two families had initially clashed over irrigation water. Such issues were common and villagers thought the two families' relationship would soon recover.

At that time, Palden and Drolma were studying in senior middle school. They knew each other because they were from the same village and were classmates, but they did not know each other very well. Palden was a gifted writer, sang popular songs well, was good-looking, and was knowledgeable. Teachers complimented him and his classmates admired him. The school brimmed with gossip about who liked him and who despised him. Girls were as excited to talk to him as they would have been to chat with a Hollywood superstar.

Drolma, on the other hand, was academically in the middle of her class. Teachers and classmates treated her well. She was outgoing, humorous, and easy to get along with. Girls envied her beauty, which made her the focus of many boys' fantasies. To other girls, she was an obstacle to their finding a boyfriend. Palden and Drolma shared being kind to everyone and were never arrogant.

When the conflict between their families began, Palden and Drolma were in school and ignorant of village goings-on. Within two days, however, news of a conflict reached Palden.

"Hey! Palden! I heard your family was fighting Drolma's family yesterday," a classmate said confidentially in their classroom

after afternoon classes.

"What? Fighting about what?" asked Palden. He could not believe their families would quarrel. He thought there must be some misunderstanding as his mind raced through the possibilities.

"They argued about irrigation water," said his classmate.

"Oh, maybe it's true," Palden replied in a strained voice. Struggling over water is common as villagers take turns irrigating their fields both day and night in winter. Palden worried that if a fight came, his relatives might be physically hurt because Drolma had three elder brothers each strong enough to fight his father. Apart from his father, Palden was the only man in his family. They had no relatives in the village and would be essentially helpless if conflict came. After a while, he ran to a telephone kiosk outside the school and called his parents to ensure everything was fine.

"Hello, it's Palden," he said

"How are you?" his sister answered.

"I'm great. Is everything there OK?" Palden asked.

"Father was hurt in a fight yesterday," his sister sobbed. Palden suddenly understood what must have happened the day before, and a flame of anger rose inside him. He could not breathe normally.

She went on to describe how Drolma's father and three brothers had ganged up on his father. Fortunately, villagers had intervened – if they had not, his father might be dead. Palden's mother was caring for his father at home. As he listened, Palden decided that, as the only other man in his family, he must avenge the injustice done to his father. However, he realized it was impossible for him to fight four big men unless he had a gun or could study black magic like Milarepa.<sup>1</sup> Since both were unattainable, there was nothing to do but endure his shame and anger.

The suffering had only begun. A few days later, Palden's mother could no longer endure the humiliation from her husband's beating by four men in front of all the villagers in broad daylight and asked help from her brother, an official in the county seat. She told

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<sup>1</sup> Milarepa (1040-1123) was a well-known Tibetan yogi who achieved enlightenment in one lifetime. He was extremely thin because he ate very little during long periods of meditation.

him everything and begged for his help.

Drolma's family had been unaware that Palden's uncle was a powerful official and, while they were still savoring their victory, a clerk came to their home and ordered them to appear in court in a month. The four heroes then knew they were in trouble, but it was too late to avoid a court appearance.

"Father, what should we do next month in court?" asked the second oldest son, Losang, fear on his face.

His father didn't answer, because he had fallen deep into thought. Finally he managed, "I'm sure they will fine us, and..."

"Then what will happen, Father? Tell us," his sons asked nervously. They were afraid of the police and of prison, because they had heard other prisoners beat you and that you suffered terribly.

"I'm not sure if they will imprison us," said their father, but he knew, given Palden's powerful uncle, they stood a good chance of being jailed.

"Father, is there a way to avoid this?" the eldest son, Rinchen, asked, his voice now softer than a girl's, though he always raised his voice in arguments with villagers.

"No, there's no way, unless we beg that family to forgive us," replied the father.

"What? It's impossible to beg that monster! I'd rather go to prison!" said Losang angrily.

"Yes, I agree," the youngest son, Nima, interjected.

"Shut up! I know it's shameful, but it's the only chance we have. We've got to try!" shouted their father. He knew the villagers would denigrate his family if they asked their enemy for forgiveness, but maybe it was the only solution.

After talking it over further, they eventually decided to apologize to Palden's family. Two days later, Drolma's father took a bag with two bottles of liquor, some cigarettes, and a white silk *katag* in his right hand. In his left hand he held a sheep's hindquarters in a big, black plastic bag. But before he reached the door of Palden's house, he was accosted by a notorious village gossip.

"Hey! What are you doing out so early in the morning?" she asked. Seeing what he held in his hands, she had already guessed his purpose.

"You can see for yourself," Drolma's father replied, knowing instantly she would spread the news throughout the village. He knew there was no point in lying and continued on to Palden's home.

"Are you coming to beat my husband again?" asked Palden's mother angrily, when he stepped inside their courtyard.

"Please don't joke, Sister. I'm coming to visit your husband," said Drolma's father, using 'Sister' in the hope of appeasing her.

"How funny! Did you forget how the four of you beat my husband? And how you pushed away my daughter when she tried to stop you?" she said angrily.

"I'm sorry for all of that. I've come today to sincerely apologize for the wrong we did your family," he said in shame.

Palden's mother held a broom as she stood in the courtyard, and put herself between Drolma's father and the door to the house. "What? You bastard! Shameless wretch! Rubbish!..." she scolded endlessly.

He didn't know what to do and stood dumbly, holding his gifts.

"Anyway, I know I was wrong, so I brought these things for your husband," he said, holding out what he had brought.

She pushed his hands away and shouted, "We aren't starving! Get out of here! Now!" Her husband, lying in bed just a few meters away, said not a word.

Drolma's father knew his mission was useless and felt even more humiliated because he had been scolded by a woman. He silently swore to return the insult someday, angrily returned home, and told his sons what he had suffered from Palden's mother.

The three sons listened without suggestions. There was nothing to do but await the court's judgment.

When they first heard what was happening in their village, Drolma and Palden regarded each other as enemies. Privately, however, neither wanted their families' troubles to control their school life and determine their personal relationship. One afternoon Palden decided to have a straightforward talk with Drolma.

"Drolma, do you have free time now?" he asked after classes were over one afternoon, unsure if Drolma would agree to talk.

"Yeah, for what?" she said nervously. She knew Palden was

not the sort of person who would threaten someone, but she still hesitated.

"I just want to talk about what's going on between our families. Don't worry, I'll only talk," Palden said.

Drolma blushed when she heard him say that. Although she had never said anything, she was as infatuated with Palden as were all the other girls.

"OK, no problem," Drolma said.

"We don't have to be enemies because of our families, do we?" said Palden.

"No, of course not!" Drolma said.

"Great! In that case, we have something more to talk about," said Palden with a smile.

"What? I don't understand..." Drolma said.

"I think we should counsel our families to stop fighting," Palden said.

"I see. I tried to counsel my father, but your family accused him. My father and brothers must go to court in a few days," Drolma said, not knowing how she could help.

"Yes, I know. I also tried to stop my parents, but they were very angry and wouldn't listen," said Palden.

He had called his parents that morning. His father had angrily said, "I'm wondering if you are my real son?" Palden doubted if his father would ever listen to him again.

Palden and Drolma talked about their families and their school lives for some time. Both felt better. Drolma had always liked Palden and her attitude towards him only improved as they chatted.

Fifteen days after the conflict, the two families met in court. The judge ordered Drolma's family to pay a fine, and also put the three sons and their father in prison for forty-five days. The two families then became irreconcilable enemies.

When their time in prison was over, Drolma's father and brothers returned home. They said they had not suffered much in prison because they had always stuck together. Their enmity toward Palden's family had increased. They never talked or greeted Palden's family members in the village, and they did not conceal the extent of their hatred. Villagers tried to pacify them, but all peacemaking

efforts failed because of their stubbornness. Though they were enemies, at least the two families did not come to physical blows.

Time passed like the wind. Drolma and Palden entered their final year of senior middle school. If they passed the university entrance exam they would enter college. Palden was now nineteen and fascinated everyone even more than before. He was busy all year preparing for his college entrance examination and hoped to enter a good college. Drolma was also a good student and her reputation as a beauty had spread far and wide.

Since their first talk, they had been on friendly terms and never blamed each other for their families' problems. Drolma thought Palden was thoughtful and kind, and gradually fell in love with him, keeping her feelings a secret until their last year in senior middle school. She wanted to tell him of her love but, for what seemed like an eternity, she lacked courage. One evening at a school dance, she decided it was time to act. She called Palden after the dance finished, not knowing where such courage came from. "Maybe I love him too much," she thought.

When they met, she touched Palden's back lightly and said, "You danced very well tonight."

"Really? Thanks Drolma. So did you," he said, smiling.

"May we have a talk?" asked Drolma. She felt that this sentence was almost impossible to say. She had no idea what to do next and was nervous about expressing her feelings.

"Sure, why not? You're not going to eat me, are you?" said Palden.

"No! Just follow me," Drolma said and walked to the playground. The sky was filled with stars and everything was beautiful. The mountains were like a big picture under the night sky and the moonlit playground where couples were romantically strolling seemed to belong only to them. A cool breeze blew, giving them respite from the hot summer temperatures.

"Hey, it's time for you to say something," said Palden. She did not know how to tell him, except to come right out and say it. For a girl it was embarrassing, but her friends said that nowadays such untraditional things were common.

"I... I want... you... to be... my boyfriend," she said, taking a

long time. She blushed, shocked by her own words. Everything became deathly still, as if the whole world was deep asleep.

Palden liked Drolma and had not been brave enough to tell her. Now everything was like a dream! For a long time he did not break the silence, but finally managed, "Hey Drolma, today is not April Fools' Day. Don't joke with me, OK?"

"Oh... I know today isn't April Fools' Day. I'm serious," Drolma said.

He knew she was in love with him, and he realized how lucky he was. They confided their feelings and, with a laugh, became lovers that night. They did not tell their families. As time passed, they helped each other in school and prepared together for the college entrance examination, which was rapidly approaching. They were both excited, believing that they had a good chance of passing.

Unluckily, Drolma's score was low, but Palden was accepted into a good college. Drolma wanted to take the examination a year later, but her illiterate father thought she would be unable to pass and ordered her to return home.

Palden went to a college far from the village and from Drolma, but their love kept them close. They secretly called each other, and sometimes exchanged letters. When Palden returned home during holidays, they went on secret dates. This continued for four years until Palden graduated. During his college time, many girls asked him to be their boyfriend, but he ignored them. While at school, he became increasingly sophisticated. Meanwhile several families sent marriage proposals for Drolma, but she rejected them.

Her father said, "I don't know what the hell you're thinking! Who is it that you think you're going to marry?"

Drolma's only reply was a smile.

After Palden returned home, he found a high-paying job in the county town. He thought it was time to ask Drolma's parents to allow Drolma and him to marry. He worried they would disagree and also might cause trouble, because the conflict between the two families had never really been resolved. Drolma and Palden still met secretly when he returned to the village on the weekends, but no secret can be kept forever, and their families eventually learned about their relationship.



"Son, do you really like Drolma or are you just playing?" said Palden's father, hoping the relationship was a passing fling, not understanding that they had been in love for eight long years.

"Father, I swear my relationship with Drolma is real. I want her to be my wife," said Palden.

"Son, are you crazy? We are enemies! How could you?" cried his mother.

"Please don't think that way, Mother. That was several years ago. Let's all move on!" Palden said.

"My poor little son, do you think Drolma's father will agree?" asked Palden's mother.

"I'm not sure. I hope he will," Palden said, unconcerned about the consequences, and sent someone to ask Drolma's family for her hand in marriage.

Drolma's father was furious when he heard this. He could not understand how his own daughter could love his enemy's son. He thought she would be treated as an enemy by Palden's family. As an official with a stable job and a good salary, he could choose anyone he wanted to, but somehow he had chosen Drolma! Drolma's father refused Palden's proposal, and warned Palden never to contact Drolma again.

Palden could not help but disobey and the two lovers continued seeing each other. Even though their families hated each other and disagreed with their marriage, the couple led a happy clandestine life, both believing that their families would eventually agree to the marriage.

They were wrong. The marriage never happened. Life is often short and unpredictable. Bad luck crept up on the couple slowly and quietly. They were deeply in love and blissfully ignorant.

...

The summer afternoon sun beat down so harshly that everyone underneath felt they were being boiled in a pot. That the sun's heat was destroying the annual crops was a universal complaint, though everyone knew it was futile to mutter. Only when clouds appeared would anything change. In time, everyone went about their business and complained about the heat less.

Drolma's brothers, Rinchen and Losang, were drunk after

drinking beer with some other villagers near the corner of a small store. One pointed into the distance and said, "Who the hell are those two?" The couple wasn't far away. They quickly realized it was Palden and Drolma.

"Hey Rinchen, is your sister going to marry that guy?" said a man who had proposed to Drolma and was now jealous that she was with Palden.

"Impossible! I'm that girl's eldest brother. Our family and that guy's family are enemies," Rinchen said, anger welling up inside him as he recalled the conflict between their families, how he and his brothers had been humiliated, and how the conflict had remained unresolved, casting a shadow over their lives. In particular, his mind returned to a terrible day in prison, when a group of at least ten prisoners had ordered them to wash their boss's feet. Drolma's brothers and father refused, were then beaten, forced to wash the boss's feet, and then drink the dirty water.

Tibetans consider feet to be the dirtiest part of the human body and to drink such water is the most humiliating thing imaginable. They buried this humiliation deep in their hearts and never told anybody. Now, seeing his own sister with his enemy's son, all of Rinchen's pain and humiliation surfaced, coursing through him like an electric shock. He stood up and ran at the couple, jerking his dagger from his belt.

Drolma and Palden did not even notice him coming. By the time Palden felt the knife in his gut, it was too late.

Rinchen took Palden from Drolma without a word. He plunged his dagger into Palden's belly again and again and again. Drolma was stunned. When she saw blood spurting from Palden's body, she revived and roared like a dragon, terrifying all who heard.

Rinchen fled.

We came when we heard this cry, but there was nothing we could do. Drolma and Palden's parents arrived soon after me. Palden's mother saw her son lying on the ground, his body bathed in blood. She snatched him from Drolma's arms and screamed in agony. Palden's father stood by his wife. He did not cry. It was not that he did not want to; it was just that he was deep in thought. His heart was bleeding.

Drolma's parents worried about Rinchen. They knew he would be executed. That was the law, and there was no escape.

Palden's parents lost their only son because of an inconsequential quarrel over water, and Drolma lost her future husband. Soon she would lose her eldest brother. Because of a simple quarrel, two families lost sons and gained nothing but permanent anguish and regret.

A month after Palden's death, Rinchen was arrested and sentenced to death for murder. He was trembling when the sentence was handed down. His family did not come to hear the judgment.

Palden's parents have not stopped grieving. The wrinkles on their faces deepen.

Drolma went to a nunnery to spend the rest of her life.

Now, looking back on things, exactly who was to blame?

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Drolma, sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།

Hualong 化隆

Hui 回

*katag*, kha btags ཁ་བཏགས།

Klu rgyal 'bum ལུ་རྒྱལ་འབུམ།

Losang, blo bzang ལྷོ་བཟང་།

Nima, nyi ma ཉི་མ།

Palden, dpal ldan དཔལ་ལྷན།

Qinghai 青海

Rinchen, rin chen རིན་ཆེན།

Bkra shis rab brten ('Bri stod Nationalities Middle School)

I am a graduate of Qinghai Nationalities University and teach English at 'Bri stod Nationalities Middle School.

You come along a dirt path that runs by a row of adobe houses, each with a small yard. The houses and yards are made of packed earth mixed with yak dung. They are so dilapidated you worry a puff of wind will send them toppling over on the dusty earth from which they have come. Various paths meander in different directions to each family's courtyard gate. White smoke curls up from chimneys, turning the air foggy on sunny mornings and filling the air with a distinctive odor. Some people serenely circumambulate a pile of stones carved with the Six Sacred Syllables<sup>1</sup> and other Buddhist scriptures, surrounded by prayer flags of four colors representing the Four Elements.<sup>2</sup>

An old lady sits by the path, holding a string of prayer beads in one hand and turning a prayer wheel with the other. Her dark brown face is thoroughly lined, each wrinkle representing an episode from her life. The village is surrounded by sloping hills, decorated with colorful flowers and various alpine plants, stretching out in every direction. Clusters of yaks graze in valleys. A calf runs on the pasture in a circle and then races to its mother, its tail straight in the air. The occasional neighing of horses sounds in the valleys as prayer flags flap in the wind behind a line of adobe rooms.

Father Nor bu sat on a worn-out carpet under the eaves as usual, sewing white fabric into a tent at the request of another family. It was a bright sunny day with skies that glimmered as blue as turquoise. A cup of milk tea sat in front of Nor bu, which he had ignored since Mother Sgrol ma placed it there.

Nor bu was dressed in a modern-style coat that he typically wore at home. He wore a pair of leather shoes, locally called 'army

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<sup>1</sup> *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM*, a common six syllable mantra associated with Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

<sup>2</sup> Earth, water, fire, and wind.

shoes'. Father Nor bu was forty-three, three years older than his wife.

Mother Sgrol ma wore a Tibetan robe made of artificial lambskin. Most pastoralists no longer kept sheep and the price of real lambskin was so high many Tibetans couldn't afford to buy them. She wore a pair of gold earrings whose color had faded over the years. A round metal amulet decorated with fake turquoise was around her neck.

Three adobe rooms were built in a line. A cupboard with doors decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols<sup>3</sup> stood at the back of the kitchen. There was a big Chinese metal stove with Tibetan vase patterns in the center of the room. An inlaid gold dragon wrapped around a pillar behind the stove. A yellow *kha btags*<sup>4</sup> was tied to the neck of the pillar. The shrine was a small room featuring a wooden altar where images of a local Dge lugs monastery lama and a protector deity were displayed. Sgrol ma lit a butter lamp there every morning. There were seven water offering bowls filled with ice. Sgrol ma discarded the ice and filled them with fresh water each morning.

The wind carried the strong odor of something burning. You could hear the sound of children playing on their way home. Other children chased a tractor and climbed into the trailer without the driver's knowledge.

"You should prepare lunch quickly. The children will be home soon," said Nor bu in his usual gentle tone.

Sgrol ma didn't reply for a moment, squinted into the distance, and said, "That villain must have troubled them on the way home again. I'll go to his home and talk to his parents otherwise, he won't stop."

"Hush! Don't create trouble. I'm too stressed for such trivialities! I can't bear it if there is more trouble," Nor bu said.

Mtsho mo, the seventy-five year old grandmother, wore a robe that was reasonably new but never looked clean, though Sgrol ma washed it twice a week. Mtsho mo sat on a small stool, chanting scriptures, holding her worn prayer beads in her right hand. She

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<sup>3</sup> The Eight Auspicious Symbols consist of the parasol, a pair of gold fish, a treasure vase, a lotus, a white conch shell, a victory banner, an endless knot, and the gold wheel of the dharma.

<sup>4</sup> A strip of silk given to a person, deity, or object as a sign of respect.

loved her grandchildren dearly, and frequently bought candies for her grandsons and little ornaments for her granddaughter. She grew increasingly anxious because the children hadn't returned.

"They should have returned by now. School children are naughtier these days," Grandmother said impatiently.

"I'm starving!" shouted Tshe ring suddenly. His sister, Lha mo and he parked their bicycles in the corner of the yard where five year-old Bkra shis, the youngest son, was playing like a cat, trying to catch a soccer ball. The two older children were middle school students in the county town, twelve kilometers from the township settlement. They rode bicycles to and from school.

Their parents were pastoralists who owned a few head of yaks that provided dairy products. Villagers earned much of their annual cash income in Spring from collecting and selling caterpillar fungus, a medicinal herb. The family went to collect caterpillar fungus every year, as did most local families. Local schools freed students to collect it during their summer holiday. Caterpillar fungus grew in the valleys and on the hills near the settlement. Bkra shis and Mtsho mo stayed at home, taken care of by Nor bu or Sgrol ma, while the other went to collect caterpillar fungus with the two older children. Nor bu also made tents and sold them to other families, adding to the family's income.

"Did you prepare lunch? I'm dying of hunger and we must return to school soon. None of the other parents prepare late lunches," said Tshe ring.

"Shut up or go to another home for your meals," scolded his mother.

"Be patient, boy. Don't complain just because you are a student," Nor bu said in a voice with equal measures of disapproval and kindness.

"You two mistreat your children. If they leave, I'll follow them," murmured Grandmother, coming to the rescue as usual, when the parents scolded the children.

Sgrol ma put two bowls of noodles on the wood table and Tshe ring brought two pairs of chopsticks from the cupboard.

Tshe ring and Lha mo were in grade three of junior middle school, would graduate in September, and then go to the prefecture

seat to continue their studies.

Tshe ring was fifteen years old and had attended school since he was six. He was tall with a crooked nose that resembled his father's. His hair was fashionably wavy with white and gray streaks among the black, the consequence of a Vitamin C deficiency. He obeyed his father, and took care of his attractive sister.

Seventeen year-old Lha mo was charming and always dressed in neat, clean clothes. She had bright eyes and her attractiveness tempted many schoolboys, and also brought trouble. She had started school when she was seven, and hadn't done very well. Nor bu then insisted she repeat grade one, which explained why she and her brother were in the same grade.

"Mother! Where did you put my lipstick?" yelled Lha mo.

"Behind the mirror," Sgrol ma replied.

Many boys tried to win Lha mo's heart but she rejected them all. When her classmates told her she was a beauty, she usually replied, "I didn't choose to be a beauty, the gods made me so." She was forthright in her dealings with every student except Don 'grub, her neighbor's son, a handsome boy of eighteen with long dark hair hanging above his broad shoulders, and a bit taller than Lha mo, which gave her a feeling of security. They were fated to be in the same school and shared the same hobby, photography. In time they walked together in the schoolyard during breaks, filling the air with murmured words of endearment. The progress of their relationship was rapid and surprised observers. They gave much attention to their appearance before meeting on the bank of a stream that flowed like a white silk streamer waving in the breeze. "I'll graduate soon and go with my brother to the prefecture seat for senior middle school. I won't see you then," Lha mo said sadly.

"Yeah, I'll miss you everyday," murmured Don 'grub. Lha mo took an amulet from around her neck, gave it to Don 'grub, and said, "This will protect you."

Don 'grub put it around his neck and pulled Lha mo into his arms. She leaned her head on his shoulder. They quietly remained together for two hours. When it was time to leave, Lha mo looked into his eyes intently, reluctant to part, then whispered, "Separation won't change our love. What matters is our hearts."



"I don't want you to leave. I can't live without you!" Don 'grub exclaimed.

"I must go. Father will scold me if I don't," Lha mo said.

"Can we both leave school and go where nobody will bother us?" Don 'grub said.

"Impossible. How can we live without our parents?" Lha mo said.

The shining stars quivered in darkness. Everything was deadly quiet, except for dogs barking in the distance. The crescent moon was shyly gathering strength amid thousands of shining stars.

Finally they stood. Don 'grub escorted her to her home, kissed her gently, and held her red cheeks in his palms for a tender moment. Then she walked inside the family courtyard. It was nearly two a.m. when Lha mo crept into her bedroom, but her mother heard.

The next morning, Sgrol ma came to the kitchen and demanded, "Where were you last night? Did you meet that boy? What did you do with him? Don't lie to me!"

"Nothing. I just went to his home and we chatted," replied Lha mo, her head down.

"Nonsense! Your behavior is worse than we imagined!" yelled Sgrol ma.

"Don't talk to your child like that. She'll leave home soon," said Nor bu calmly.

"Don't scold her! She's still young," Grandmother said, patting Lha mo's back to comfort her.

"I want freedom to deal with my own business. Mother forbids me to do anything," Lha mo sobbed, and put her head in her grandmother's arms.

Her mother scolded, "How can she talk about her mother like that? You aren't mature enough to make your own decisions."

During quarrels, Nor Bu kept as silent as though he were a guest. After breakfast, he resumed making the tent. Nor bu heard the dogs barking and said, "The dogs are hungry. Don't forget to feed them."

Sgrol ma continued scolding Lha mo.

"I'll take the child away from home if you hate her so much," Grandmother said.

"You allow the children to go their own way. Be quiet and behave like a bystander. I have the authority to educate my own child," Sgrol Ma retorted.

"I won't let anyone hurt them until I die!" Grandmother said furiously.

"I'll see his parents tomorrow!" Sgrol ma said, then took a pot with leftovers and went outside to feed the dogs.

...

"If they love each other passionately, I have nothing to say," Don 'grub's father said. "I know they're too young but, on the other hand, we can't forbid their minds from thinking, though we try to stop their actions."

"I won't let your son contact my daughter," Sgrol ma said.

"We have nothing more to say then," concluded Don 'grub's father quietly. "I don't want to interfere in children's business if they don't do silly things."

Sgrol ma left her neighbor's home as the red sun burnt the earth, which seemed to vibrate under Sgrol ma's tired eyes. The air stank and she blew her nose to clear her mind. Her slow pace gave opportunity for her to consider. "They'll leave soon. I won't scold my dear daughter anymore," Sgrol ma muttered. Her tired eyes filled with tears as sadness flooded her heart. She heard the feeble sound of distant laughing. Her children were waving and calling to her.

The sky rapidly vanished, conquered by large clusters of dark, ominous clouds that swept in low to the earth, quickly covering what was left of the sun. A big eagle circled Sgrol ma and squawked horribly. The dark clouds were moving west, mingling with the ends of the earth. The eagle seemed to be sending her a message. She quickened her pace and was soon panting. When she got home and stepped inside, nobody was in the kitchen. She pushed opened the bedroom door, and saw Nor bu lying on the bed. The three children were kneeling by him, sobbing dejectedly. They all looked up at Sgrol ma worriedly.

"What happened?" Sgrol ma asked.

"Father fainted from a sudden headache," Tshe ring said.

"Why?" Sgrol ma said.

"Our protector deity lost his temper because of your

quarreling," Grandmother said, sitting in a corner of the room, her hands busy with prayer beads and the prayer wheel.

"What should we do?" Sgrol Ma said.

"Invite monks immediately," Grandmother ordered sternly.

Sgrol ma and Tshe ring invited local monks. Ten days passed and Nor bu improved. As the monks were leaving the home after having completed various rituals, the head monk said, "Your protector deity is pacified. Nor bu will be fine. Don't upset the deity again, otherwise things will be worse."

Nor bu recovered and the two older children were noticeably more mature.

As time drew near for the two children to leave for the distant boarding school, Grandmother and Sgrol ma shed tears of sadness.

Sgrol ma brought out fire on a metal plate, added a spoonful of barley flour on the fire, and then sprinkled some water from the kettle lid. She put this incense offering outside on a big stone, chanting inaudibly. She prayed for her children while offering incense to the deity.

Grandmother's face flooded with tears and her eyes were red. She finally blurted, "Don't forget to chant every evening, and don't lose your amulets. I'll always pray for you."

Father Nor bu escorted the children to the bus station. Lha mo and Tshe ring kissed their mother and grandmother before leaving for the bus station. Sgrol ma and Grandmother stood at the house courtyard gate, watching the children disappear into the distance. Sgrol ma soon went inside the home while Grandmother still stood, rubbing her wet eyes, gazing into the distance.

"You two take care of yourselves. The most important thing is health. Education is secondary," emphasized Nor bu at the bus station, as he helped put their luggage atop the bus.

...

Time passed. Tshe ring and Lha mo boarded at the new school, and were initially interested in their new surroundings. They were in the same class and both studied hard. Tshe ring felt fine and was never homesick. In contrast, Lha mo felt a bit nostalgic. Though her mother had forbidden her to contact Don 'grub, she missed her mother and sobbed in her quilt at night, wrapping her head in her quilt.

Lha mo soon regained her exuberant personality and got along well with all the students, especially the boys, who were drawn to her and eager to become more intimate. She was only attracted by Rin chen, who was tall, handsome, had a pale face, and wore fashionable clothes. He attracted many girls. Rin chen was a grade higher than Lha mo and was three years older. In the course of time, Lha mo and Rin chen became closer and met in the schoolyard one night when most students were dreaming in their beds. Lha mo and Rin chen sat close together on the stairway that led to their classroom. The universe seemed full of their sweet emotions. A sickle moon and an incalculable number of stars decorated a boundless sky, twinkling in the gentle breeze. Lha mo looked up, and saw a star fall. Feeling hurt and frightened, her brain was paralyzed and she couldn't speak for a moment. A bit later, with widened eyes and mouth, she managed to stammer, "Look!"

"What's wrong?" asked Rin chen.

"I don't know," she replied, and then he walked her to her dormitory. Once in bed, she thought about the falling star and couldn't sleep. "It's an omen. Something bad will happen to me," she worried. She slept finally, and dreamed an old man was calling her. She was awakened by this disturbing dream and didn't sleep well the rest of the night.

Rumors flew about their relationship. Tshe ring heard but concentrated on his studies and, as usual, said nothing. He recalled his father's advice and worked hard. His honesty and diligence attracted many girls, but he ignored them.

Finally, however, Tshe ring felt he should say something and one evening said to Lha mo, "You should think about our family. We are their hopes and wishes. Don't disappoint them."

"I know what I'm doing. Don't order me," she replied, stormed out of the classroom, and slammed the door behind her.

...

Lha mo and Rin chen drew ever closer and spent some nights together in hotels. This relationship continued until Rin chen graduated from senior middle school and went to college. Lha mo still loved him though he called less often as time passed. Lha mo thought he would marry her if they got their families' permission. She

naively clung to the belief that they would have a romantic life together in the end. Rin chen visited her a few times after he graduated from senior middle school and they spent some romantic nights together.

When she and her brother were preparing for the college entrance examination, each student was given a health check. When it was Lha mo's turn, she uneasily and timidly entered the room. She was pregnant! This news swept through the school like wild fire. Her bright future dimmed. She was now eighteen and seemed to have fallen into a deep hole surrounded by darkness. She could see no hope. She was enraged at Rin chen, who never called her after this news. She recalled his gentle words and loving expression when they were together. Everything had changed. The only thing in her mind was hatred and helplessness.

When the news reached her family, Nor bu came to school by bus. The stench of the town assaulted him and made him uncomfortable. He heard thunder in his mind, combined with exhaustion and anxiety. He went to meet the school director and other teachers. "You should think about her future. She is too young to have a child. She should have an abortion," the school director suggested.

"I have no right to kill an innocent life," Nor bu said.

"We have some responsibility for this situation. We can pay her to work in the school as an entrance guard," the school director said.

"Thank you, but first I want to take her home and let the baby be born there. I need to discuss this with my family," Nor bu said.

Nor bu and the teachers went to Lha mo's room, pushed open the door, and found her hanging from a rope tied to a metal bar in the ceiling. They immediately rescued her.

"Please don't care about me. I'm not worth your concern," coughed Lha mo. "I have no value. I can't live in this world."

"What foolishness!" her father cried.

"We decided to allow you to work in the school as a guard. Take this chance to find a new life," comforted the school director.

She cried desperately. Her father hugged her to his chest and comforted, "My child, don't cry. We are going home."

...

Lha mo and Nor bu returned home. The family was very upset by this mishap. "I knew this would happen. I told you to stay away from the guys," Sgrol ma said, pointing at Lha mo, who was sobbing quietly by the stove.

"Who is the child's father?" Nor bu asked Lha mo.

Lha mo said nothing.

"He should be responsible. Tell us whose child it is," Sgrol ma said.

"It happened to me and I don't want other people to know more. I will obey you in everything. It's my fate, and I accept it," Lha mo said.

"Listen to her. She is sad enough," Grandmother said.

"At least we should let his parents know," Nor bu said.

Sgrol ma took Lha mo to the bedroom.

Over dinner that evening, the family discussed consulting a local lama for a divination. "Let the child be born first. Then we'll ask the reincarnation lama if she should accept the school job or continue her study," Sgrol ma suggested.

"It is wise to accept the job since it's very hard to find a job, even for college graduates. Since our daughter had this misfortune, I think it is hard for her to concentrate on her studies," Nor bu said.

"We should ask the lama for advice. It is very important for her life," Grandmother said.

Darkness attacked and the world became quieter, a world in which thousands of stars glimmered in the sky amid the sound of flapping prayer flags and barking dogs. There seemed to be life in the world after all. Falling stars streaked through the sky.

Who will see them fall?

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Bri stod འབྲི་བསྟོད།, Zhiduo 治多  
Bkra shis བཀྲ་ཤིས།  
Bkra shis rab brten བཀྲ་ཤིས་རབ་བརྟེན།  
Dge lugs pa དགེ་ལུགས་པ།  
Don 'grub རོན་འགྲུབ།  
kha btags ཁ་བརྟགས།  
Lha mo ལྷ་མོ།  
Mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།  
Nor bu འོ་རུ།  
oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོྫེ་མ་ཌི་པཎེ་ཧུྃ།  
Rin chen རིན་ཆེན།  
rtsam pa རུམ་པ།  
Sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།  
Tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།





## SILENT AS A WINTER CUCKOO: MY GRANDPARENTS' LOVERS

Pad+ma dbang chen (Xi'an International Studies University)

When my grandparents were children, parents were gods and their decisions about such issues as marriage and the choice of marriage partners were final. Children had no right to choose a spouse. Many parents found a daughter-in-law with a blood relationship for their son, believing this would better ensure family harmony. Consequently, many Tibetans struggled in sad marriages. Of course, parents hoped their children would have a good, stable life and not all arranged marriages were unhappy.

When Grandfather was eighteen he herded sheep on our pastureland everyday. At that time, sheep and goats covered an enormous mountain that resembled a member of the Himalayas. Herders stayed together, played, told folktales, and sang folksongs. Some wrestled and others talked about their lovers. In many ways this daily gathering resembled a celebration of victory in battle.

Grandfather and his lover, Dkon mchog mtsho, herded and had lunch together everyday. They went home from the pastureland and soon met again after supper, because they loved and needed each other as fish need water. They felt that they were the happiest people in the world, and hoped to marry. Everyone understood their intimate relationship and envied their loyalty to each other.

Some other girls were especially jealous because Grandfather was handsome.

In time, Great-grandfather discovered their relationship and resolved to end it. Grandfather was as silent as a winter cuckoo, because he was afraid of his father. However, he thought about how to convince his parents, or how to have a life with his lover. After some days he decided to elope, went to the place where he usually met Dkon mchog mtsho, and found her there. They looked longingly at each other as Dkon mchog mtsho's tears streamed down her red cheeks and seeped into the earth.

Grandfather embraced her tightly and told her what he had

planned. Dkon mchog mtsho thought a moment and agreed.

The next morning, Grandfather took some bags, met Dkon mchog mtsho, and prepared to run away. They walked, hand in hand, for a long way until a familiar voice suddenly boomed behind them. They turned and saw Great-grandfather, who had pursued them. He then forced them to return home.

Grandfather's plan thus became like autumn leaves that fall from trees onto the earth.

When they got home, Great-grandfather warned Grandfather, "If you meet Dkon mchog mtsho again, I will disown you, my dear son."

Grandfather did not reply because he knew all their relatives would scold him for opposing his father's decision. It was unthinkable that a son would disobey his father's decision. Such a man was regarded as worthless.

Great-grandfather said, "Next month, we will visit Sangs rgyas mtsho's home."

"Why must you dictate my marriage? I only want to marry Dkon mchog mtsho. Father, please permit me to marry my true love – don't force me," Grandfather said sadly.

Great-grandfather said, "Please understand that our family is poor. Two years ago, I went to Uncle Rin chen's home and arranged your marriage to Sangs rgyas mtsho. If you marry her, I can work with Rin chen, a well-known and successful businessman. This will greatly improve our poor life. Do you want our family members to starve?"

Speechless, Grandfather nodded in apparent agreement.

Grandfather's torment lasted for a half-month, and then Great-grandfather took him, a bottle of barley liquor, and two hind quarters of mutton to Grandmother's home. My grandparents met and chatted about their childhood and then Grandfather told her that he had a sweetheart.

Grandmother was happy to hear this and confided that she also had a lover. She said, "We herd together, which allows for frequent contact. My lover and I have shared one quilt and what happens between lovers happened. My father doesn't know. Thank you for telling me about your lover. Continue your relationship with her."

Maybe she is still waiting for you. Also, we have a blood relationship that makes our marriage unsuitable."

Grandfather thought for a bit and then murmured, "You're right, but we dare not oppose our parents' decisions. Let's solve these problems. Let's marry according to their arrangements and then I'll escape with my lover when the chance comes. You can return home and marry your lover. We will thus all achieve our hopes."

Grandmother thought for a moment and said, "Your father will kill you if you do this."

At that moment, Grandmother's father appeared and said, "You will marry on the fifteenth day of next month."

My grandparents nodded their heads in reluctant agreement.

After a meal, Great-grandfather very happily said goodbye to Grandmother's family. Grandmother nodded to Grandfather, signaling again that she agreed with his idea.

Grandmother knew that opposing her father was useless, but she cried loudly for two or three days and ate nothing. Then her father said, "If you live, you are his person and if you die you are his ghost."

When he got back home, Grandfather met Dkon mchog mtsho as quickly as he could and told her his idea. She listened, embraced Grandfather, and agreed.

The wedding day came and my grandparents married as planned. Though Dkon mchog mtsho understood why Grandfather had gone through with the marriage, the scene of her lover's marriage made her so sad and angry that she then married the man her father had arranged for her to marry.

Grandfather was devastated that his plan was shattered and that he seemed to have lost his true love.

Some days passed. Grandfather gathered his courage and decided to go to Dkon mchog mtsho's husband's home and kidnap his lover the next morning. When he arrived, he found Dkon mchog mtsho and her husband doing family chores. Grandfather walked over to them, spoke to Dkon mchog mtsho, and grabbed her hand.

Dkon mchog mtsho was at a loss, but did not resist. Then her husband stepped in, and the two began fighting. Suddenly, Dkon mchog mtsho's husband took out a dagger and stabbed Grandfather in the gut. Grandfather continued to beat him with his fists. A few

minutes later, blood had soaked Grandfather's long robe and he stumbled and fell.

Dkon mchog mtsho's husband squatted nearby, holding his head in his hands. Dkon mchog mtsho wept loudly and embraced Grandfather tightly, her head on his chest. She thought if Grandfather died, she would soon join him in the afterlife. Her husband just stared at them.

Dkon mchog mtsho's father-in-law came, took in everything that had happened with a single glance, and angrily beat his son. He then took Grandfather to a small, distant hospital where, fortunately, he was saved. Nearly as bad as Grandfather's wounds was the gossip about what had happened. Grandfather and Grandmother were deeply humiliated.

After three months, my relatives brought Grandfather back home. This was followed by a long period of dispute between the involved families. Finally, expensive items were given to Grandmother's family in apology. Great-grandfather begged Grandmother's family to accept their apology, and Grandfather promised to never do such things again and swore to be good to Grandmother. Grandmother's family was touched by Grandfather's sincerity. They also realized Grandfather was young and impetuous, so at last the families were reconciled – but only after 2,000 RMB was paid to Dkon mchog mtsho's family after many of her husband's relatives came to Grandfather's home demanding compensation.

The conflict was solved.

Dkon mchog mtsho decided to never meet Grandfather again, because she was afraid it would again lead to horrible events.

Grandfather felt sorry for the pain he had caused Grandmother and determined to be good to her.

Grandfather and Dkon mchog mtsho's love resembled a short-lived rainbow that vanishes in the summer sky.

My grandparents needed a house and prepared the construction materials. There were many things they needed to do. Grandmother found that there was no way for her to escape the marriage her father had arranged for her and soon stopped contact with her lover.

The old adage 'Love will come in time' proved true and my

grandparents slowly grew to love each other and eventually had a happy life together.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Dkon mchog mtsho དཀོན་མཆོག་མཚོ།

Pad+ma dbang chen པདྨ་དབང་ཆེན།

Rin chen རིན་ཆེན།

Sangs rgyas mtsho སངས་རྒྱས་མཚོ།

Xi'an 西安

Pad+ma dbang chen (Xi'an International Studies University)

I heard this story when I was a student in Xi'an City. I added to it, using pieces of other stories I have heard, and my imagination.

A gentle breeze blew across everyone's face, creating a feeling of pleasure. Sunshine brought the earth to life in the same way a clanging bell jars sleepers awake. Birds flitted in a cloudless blue sky announcing spring's immanent arrival.

It was the second weekend after the start of semester. Sunshine beamed through our dorm room window. I took deep breaths of cool air and felt excellent. Everything seemed new and fresh. I went outside to review some materials for class. I reached the school sports ground and found many students reading aloud and studying their lessons, filling the playground with noise. I sat on a step and began reading.

A few minutes later, a young man whom I had seen before walked within about ten meters of me. I realized that he was someone I had first met when the term began. I greeted him and we soon began chatting about our winter holidays. He told me this story about a couple.

#### CHOS DBYANGS AND MGU RU

When Chos dbyangs first came to Xi'an to begin her studies, she was gentle and kind with a mind as pure as snow. Everyone liked her. She studied hard during the first semester, listening carefully, and doing what the teachers said. She spent most of her time studying and practiced her Chinese with her Chinese classmates when she had free time. She never wasted time. Her school life was fulfilling and many students envied her. In fact, so many compliments bounced around her that she became somewhat self-intoxicated.

Feeling bored one Saturday morning, she considered playing shuttlecock or chatting with someone. Undecided, she instinctively

wandered to an internet bar, went inside, logged into her QQ account, noticed a request from someone to join her QQ list, accepted, and started chatting.

"Who are you? Why do you want to be my friend?" Chos dbyangs asked.

"My name is Mgu ru. I'm not sure. Maybe it's our fate," was the reply.

They each introduced themselves and soon realized that they had grown up in the same general area and were the same age. They thus had much to discuss.

The man was from an agro-pastoralist community that had ample cropland and a large number of sheep. His family was poor, however. Finally, he typed, "Please give me your phone number. I have a special feeling about you. I really feel very good when chatting with you."

Chos dbyangs thought about it for a bit, typed her phone number, said goodbye, and happily returned to her dorm room where she shared her conversation with her roommates.

Some days later, Mgu ru phoned her. Gradually their relationship became more intimate. In time, they shared the feeling lovers share. Time seemed to flow like a river that never pauses when they chatted, and Chos dbyangs experienced emotions she had never felt before. As the days passed, their love deepened. They chatted every night, and if there was a day when Mgu ru didn't phone, Chos dbyangs felt that day was empty and meaningless.

#### A CONSTRUCTION JOB

After three months, Chos dbyangs decided to find a construction job for Mgu ru and ask him to come to Xi'an so they could live together. She searched the internet and found what seemed to be a suitable job, called Mgu ru, and asked him to come.

Mgu ru then announced to his parents that he had found a job in Xi'an with the help of a friend. He said he could earn much money in a year. He lied, "My friend bought a car from his income last year. I must go there to make money to buy a car for our family. Science and



technology are now so highly developed that we cannot still ride horses and continue to live in such a poor house. Trust me! The God of Wealth has taken me into his embrace."

His family listened carefully, felt what he said was reasonable, and agreed that he could travel to Xi'an.

Mgu ru then rushed to the provincial capital, bought the cheapest train ticket available, and was soon on his way to Xi'an.

## MEETING

Chos dbyangs was overjoyed when she learned Mgu ru would soon arrive in Xi'an. Meanwhile Mgu ru was in a dream-like state on the train. He seemed to be the happiest man in the world and everything seemed beautiful. The proverb 'Shit had become gold in his eyes' was very apt. He even imagined he could hear the trees and flowers congratulating him from outside the train windows. He thought about reaching Xi'an thirteen hours later, Chos dbyangs would be waiting for him at the train station, they would walk away from the train station hand in hand...

The train arrived on time. He got off and began searching the unfamiliar faces, looking for a familiar QQ face. Finally, they saw each other. Chos dbyangs was wearing fashionable clothes and her permed hair made her even more attractive. Mgu ru was dressed in ordinary clothes. A single glance would tell you that he was a countryside man, yet his handsome features made him stand out.

They quickly drew near each other and embraced tightly. Mgu ru felt that he had found a fairy maiden and Chos dbyangs was equally satisfied. Hand in hand, they walked out from the train station while chatting about his trip. When they got close to Chos dbyangs's university, they decided to rent a room nearby to avoid their relationship being detected.

A few hours later, they had rented a room for 500 RMB a month, and moved in.

A few days passed and then Chos dbyangs took Mgu ru to the construction company that she had earlier contacted about employment. When they arrived, they met a man dressed in an

expensive suit working in a large, lavishly decorated office. The two lovers sat while Mgu ru began introducing himself. After he had said a few sentences in broken Chinese, the boss realized Mgu ru was a minority, and that he had no previous construction work experience. The boss then interrupted him, made an excuse, and said goodbye.

They disappointedly returned to their small room. Chos dbyangs felt very bad that the company had refused to hire him. She felt responsible, because she had promised Mgu ru a high-paying job before he came to Xi'an.

They had a simple, subdued supper of flat-noodle soup. Mgu ru was sad and silent. Chos dbyangs then went to a nearby store and bought ten bottles of beer, which she brought back to their room.

Mgu ru looked at Chos dbyangs and said, "I'm useless. I can't even do something as simple as get a lowly construction job."

Chos dbyangs responded by opening a bottle and drinking some cups of beer with Mgu ru. Chos dbyangs said, "Don't worry, my father puts 1,000 RMB on my bank card each month. That's enough for us to eat. Don't blame yourself, and don't blame fate. This is not your fault."

Mgu ru felt guilty and ashamed, and drank more beer.

Two hours passed.

They were drunk.

They embraced and kissed.

Chos dbyangs put one hand around Mgu ru's neck and ran her fingers through his hair with her other hand. They hugged more passionately and then kissed. Chos dbyangs moved over and sat on Mgu ru's lap...

## PREGNANT

Two months passed and Chos dbyangs felt sure she was pregnant. She and Mgu ru went to a hospital where a doctor said, "You are a student and pregnant. You need 5,000 RMB for an abortion. Life has not been fair to you."

The high fee frightened Mgu ru and Chos dbyangs, who did not have 5,000 RMB. They then decided to stay in their room and

wait. Day by day, Chos dbyangs's belly got bigger and bigger. Finally, she could no longer attend class.

When the winter holiday approached, she phoned her parents and said, "I cannot join you for the New Year, I must stay in Xi'an and study Chinese."

Her parents reluctantly agreed, and missed her terribly.

Several mornings later, a baby entered this world and a more painful life began.

#### WRONG CHOICES

Mgu ru decided to take Chos dbyangs and the baby to his home, because they could not continue to live in Xi'an, depending only on Chos dbyangs's stipend. When they got near Mgu ru's home, his parents saw three people and almost fainted. Mgu ru had earned not a single RMB, and had also brought two people home.

After Mgu ru described everything that happened, his father beat him mercilessly with a stick. Chos dbyangs stood, silently watching.

Mgu ru's father thought for many sleepless nights and then announced one morning, "I will go to Chos dbyangs's home and inform them of what has happened. I hope they will accept that Chos dbyangs has become Mgu ru's wife."

Everyone stared at him in disbelief.

Chos dbyangs pleaded, "Please don't. According to local custom, they will call all their relatives, come here in a group, and destroy this house. They might even kill Mgu ru. They will surely take all the livestock. Please leave this situation as it is."

Mgu ru's father hesitated and said, "You cannot deceive your parents. I will be responsible for whatever happens, even if it costs Mgu ru his life."

Chos dbyangs knelt and begged, "I can live without my own family, but this baby cannot live without a father. As long as we don't talk about this, no one will know. Don't create conflict between our families. Nothing good will come of it."

Mgu ru's father was touched and decided not to inform her

parents. Chos dbyangs stayed in the home. When her parents called on her mobile phone, she said that she was in school and doing very well. Her parents were very proud of having such a diligent daughter, and truly believed she was studying hard in Xi'an. Meanwhile, she lived in Mgu ru's home, leading the life of the wife of an agro-pastoralist and hardworking daughter-in-law. She spent the money her parents put in her bank account mostly on the baby, who was fretful, frequently ill, and often taken to local doctors.

Her school in Xi'an expelled her after she stopped attending classes.

Mgu ru was always busy on the grassland herding his family's livestock, or in the fields harvesting barley and doing other agricultural work.

All the locals pitied Chos dbyangs and the work hard she had to do for the family as a young wife, daughter-in-law, and mother – this had become her reality, a reality she had tried to escape by attending university.

## GONE

Time passed. Chos dbyangs's parents phoned her and said, "You have now graduated. We are so proud of you!"

Chos dbyangs answered, "Dear parents! I now have my diploma and will soon be home to show you!"

Her parents were very pleased and eagerly awaited her visit. Chos dbyangs then paid 2,000 RMB to have a fake diploma printed and returned home. She wore a happy expression, guiltily showed the diploma to her parents, and said, "I've been accepted into a graduate degree program. I want to continue my study to further develop myself."

Her parents were glad to hear this, happily consented, and handed over what Chos dbyangs said the school fees were for the first year of graduate study. Chos dbyangs took the money, returned to Mgu ru's home, and resumed her life of hard labor.

Some months later, her parents phoned her. Chos dbyangs hung up without saying anything, agonizing over her wrong choices

and years of deception.

Chos dbyangs, Mgu ru, and their baby vanished one morning. Mgu ru had made the decision that they should leave because he was worried that Chos dbyangs's family would eventually learn of their deception and what he imagined the terrible consequences that would follow.

Today, no one, not even Chos dbyangs's parents, knows where they are.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Chos dbyangs ཆོས་དབྱངས།

Mgu ru མགུ་རུ།

Pad+ma dbang chen པདྨ་དབང་ཆེན།

Rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།

Xi'an 西安

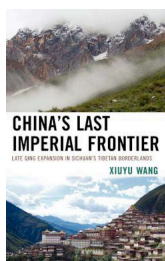
## REVIEWS



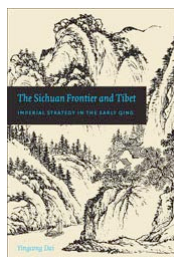


## REVIEW: *CHINA'S LAST IMPERIAL FRONTIER* AND *THE SICHUAN FRONTIER AND TIBET*

Reviewed by Robert Entenmann (St. Olaf College)



Yingcong Dai. 2009. *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. xiv+368. Maps, notes, glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-2959-8951-8 (hardcover, 80USD), 978-0-2959-8952-5 (paperback, 30USD).



Xiuyu Wang. 2011. *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. xv+291. Notes, tables, glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-7391-6809-7 (hardcover, 80USD) 978-0-7391-6810-3 (ebook, 79.99USD).

Until recently, historians have not paid much attention to Qing China's Tibetan frontier, but two excellent new studies address this neglect. One is Yingcong Dai's *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*, which examines the Qing conquest of the Khams region up to the end of the eighteenth century and its effect on Sichuan. The other is *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands* by Xiuyu Wang, in which he describes Qing efforts to impose direct administration on the Khams region in the last years of the dynasty.

The Qing annexation of eastern Khams was part of the regime's attempt to secure military control of Tibet and deny it to the Zunghar Mongols. As Dai shows, Tibet's strategic importance to the Qing directly shaped Sichuan's development. Although Sichuan was long an integral part of China, its demographic collapse during the

Ming-Qing transition turned much of the province into a wasteland. Qing frontier strategy in Khams had unintended consequences in promoting the repopulation and development of Sichuan.

Dai's first five chapters, organized by reign periods, offer a chronological account of the development of the Sichuan frontier. Two thematic chapters and an epilogue follow. Chapter One deals with the Qing conquest of Sichuan and the slow recovery of the province. Chapter Two concerns the Manchu rivalry with the Zunghar Mongols, their struggle to control Tibet, and the beginnings of Qing encroachment into Khams.

In Chapter Three, Dai begins to weave the interconnections of Qing policy toward Tibet with Sichuan's development. Sichuan was the most important base of operations for the 1720 Qing invasion of Tibet. Because of the province's strategic importance, the state emphasized development over revenue collection there. The Kangxi emperor resisted pressure to carry out a land survey and regularize tax collection in Sichuan because strategic concerns were paramount. Through most of the eighteenth century the Qing relied on tax income from the lower Yangtze while Sichuan drew resources from the center.

In Chapter Four, Dai examines the Yongzheng period (1723-1735), in which the Qing brought parts of Amdo and Khams under Qing control. At the same time, Yunnan's aggressive governor-general, Ortai, implemented the Qing's *gaitu guiliu* policy of abolishing indigenous chieftainships and bringing non-Han areas under direct Qing administration.

Chapter Five covers the sixty-year Qianlong reign, which saw successive frontier wars. The two campaigns against Jinchuan (Rgyal rong) – which deserve more study – were among the costliest and most bitterly fought of the Qianlong reign's 'Ten Great Campaigns'. In fact the Qianlong emperor calculated that the two Jinchuan wars cost more than twice the conquest of Xinjiang, an area perhaps twenty times larger than the Jinchuan region (Dai and Hua 1993, Haenisch 1935, Mansier 1990, Martin 1990). Dai points out that the Sichuan frontier was the most militarized part of the Qing empire by this time. However, the consolidation of the Qing protectorate over Tibet, the elimination of the Zunghar threat (and most of the Zunghars), and

the two campaigns against the Gurkhas, marked the end of Qing expansionism in Central Asia. Sichuan then began losing its strategic significance in the early nineteenth century.

Chapter Six examines the role of the Qing military on the Sichuan frontier. Military officers controlled large landholdings and were involved in the salt monopoly and frontier trade. Nonetheless, military spending stimulated the province's economy, expanding the market for agricultural products and other commodities, and integrated Sichuan into national commercial networks. Sichuan garrisons relied on funds allocated from other parts of China, especially Jiangnan, rather than locally raised revenue. Military campaigns also helped develop transportation and communication infrastructure. The demand for military laborers, who often greatly outnumbered soldiers, also drew landless and unemployed immigrants to the province.

In Chapter Seven, Dai examines the effect of state policy on migration to Sichuan and state participation in the grain market. She argues convincingly that low taxation and cost of living in Sichuan were important factors in attracting immigrants, a point missed by earlier studies of migration to Sichuan (e.g., Entenmann 1982, Li 1987, Sun 1997). Moreover, Dai shows that the extraction of tribute grain from the Lower Yangtze region caused grain shortages there that were increasingly offset by shipping Sichuan grain down the Yangtze. The Qing state also used grain purchases to manipulate the market and control prices. Qing expansionism was spent by the end of the eighteenth century. The state's military priorities shifted to the suppression of rebellion, beginning with the White Lotus uprising (1796-1804), which was followed by weakening of Qing suzerainty in Tibet and the deterioration of control over the Khams borderland.

The last century of Qing rule is sometimes characterized as one of *waihuan neiluan* 'external peril and internal disorder', as China faced unprecedented threats from the West and the largest rebellion in its history. Nonetheless, in the first decade of the twentieth century – which was also the final decade of the dynasty – the Qing carried out an aggressive policy of military conquest and political consolidation in eastern Khams. Xiuyu Wang's study of late Qing expansionism on the Tibetan frontier raises important

questions about the nature of the Qing as a multiethnic empire. For most of the Qing period, Khams was a borderland where Qing and Tibetan governments competed for control. However, local power-holders in Khams generally succeeded in maintaining their autonomy from both Beijing and Lha sa until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Wang's first chapter presents a historical overview of Qing-Tibetan relations and their respective roles in Khams. In particular, he offers a lucid explanation of the dynamics of local authority by *tusi* 'local chieftains' and Dge lugs pa monasteries. His second chapter provides an in-depth examination of three of the four major polities in eastern Khams: the Lcag la kingdom based in Dar tshe mdo (Kangding), monastic rule in Li thang, the 'Ba' thang chieftaincy, and the kingdom of Sde dge (Nyag rong is discussed in Chapter Three). Lcag la was most closely tied to the Qing because of its strategic position on the route from Chengdu to Lha sa. By the nineteenth century, Han merchants and their families outnumbered Khams pas in Dar tshe mdo. Families of Khams pa brokers, however, also prospered. In Li thang, the Dge lugs pa monastery, with an army numbering in the thousands, shared power with local chieftains and landholders. In this context, Qing imperial power was "symbolic and distant" and "the indigenous attitude toward it was often one of indifference" (54). In 'Ba' thang, a strong chieftaincy shared power with the monastery, which was closely tied with Dge lugs pa monasteries in Tibet. Furthermore, a hereditary chieftain in Sde dge enjoyed autonomous power. Wang further suggests in this chapter that, "Lhasa carried less weight here than elsewhere and Qing power was even more peripheral" (58).

Chapter Three describes the abortive efforts of Lu Chuanlin, the governor-general of Sichuan, to establish direct control over Nyag rong in the 1890s. Lu was eager to both expand Qing authority in Tibet and challenge the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The Qing court, however, feared that an aggressive policy would push the Tibetan government toward Britain or Russia and therefore overruled Lu and dismissed him from office.

Beginning in 1904, Xiliang, Sichuan's governor-general, renewed an assertive Qing frontier policy, largely in response to the

British expedition to Lha sa. The 1905 murder of the Qing official, Fengquan, in 'Ba' thang, led to a punitive campaign that became the pretext for destroying independent military power in Khams. This fiercely fought Khams War culminated in a Qing victory. Zhao Erfeng, newly appointed *amban*, completed the campaign with the conquest of Sde dge in 1908.

In the years that followed, the Qing gradually replaced indigenous rule by monasteries and *tusi* with Qing bureaucrats and county-level administration. Qing laws and taxation were imposed in the newly created 'Inner Region Beyond the Pass' (*guanwai aoqu*). Qing officials undertook legal and economic reforms and promoted land reclamation and Chinese-style education. The collapse of the Qing in 1911 meant many of these efforts were short-lived. Nonetheless, they served as precedents for the later expansion of Chinese control of Tibetan regions, under the Republic and the People's Republic.

Dai and Wang make good use of Chinese archival materials in Beijing, Taipei, and Chengdu, and Wang also uses unpublished materials from Dar tshe mdo. Neither uses Tibetan materials, which, in any case, may be unavailable.

The greatest drawback to Wang's book is the absence of maps. Dai serves her readers somewhat better in this regard, with a map of the Border Marches Between Sichuan and Tibet (60). Both books provide a glossary of Chinese terms, but Wang's omits personal and place names.

Dai and Wang's books, complementing each other well in their chronological coverage, greatly further our understanding of the Qing effort to secure control over the Sichuan-Khams borderlands.

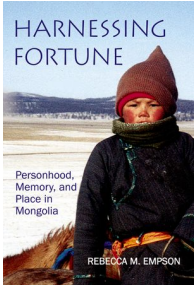
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## REVIEW: *HARNESSING FORTUNE*

Reviewed by Lisa C. Fischler (Moravian College)



Empson, Rebecca M. 2011. *Harnessing Fortune: Personhood, Memory, and Place in Mongolia*. UK: Oxford University Press. xv+388. Illustrations, notes on the text, appendices, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0197264737 (hardcover, 115USD).

*Harnessing Fortune* explores the multiple meanings of personhood in the daily lives of the Hori Buriad, pastoral herders residing in Eastern Mongolia near the Russian border, by emphasizing unitary, as opposed to binary, relationships between the separation (blood, mobility), and containment (bone, replication) of fortune. "The concept of separating and containing fortune" provides "a window through which differing modes of relatedness can be discerned" (183). The book's introduction provides an overview of the area, including the urbanizing district center and the countryside; briefly explains the notion of location in a household; outlines the chapters; and delineates the major concepts that mutually shape the relationship between people and things among the Hori Buriad. The concise conclusion reintegrates the chapters, suggesting different ways of understanding personhood among the Buriad in Mongolia in relation to the existing anthropological literature, and a broader application for the study's findings. By casting previously conceived binaries, such as affinity and consanguinity, as "intertwined, consumed, and internal to each other" (325), the ethnographic material suggests that "the tension between separation and containment seems a motif that could be used to explore different spheres" (326).

The remaining eight substantive chapters are divided into three sections: "Part One: Sites that Gather," "Part Two: Separation as Growth," and "Part Three: Absent Presences." Individually, each offers critical views of intertwined, blurred, shifting, and dependent motifs that emerge in Buriad daily life: movement and rootedness, separation and containment, affinity and consanguinity, outsiders and insiders, concealing and revealing, the deceased and the living, the invisible and the visible, and distributed and accumulated wealth. While this well-constructed ethnography on the Buriad will doubtless interest anthropologists of East Asia, it also contains material that will engage scholars of comparative sociology; of East Asian, Chinese, and Russian studies; of post-communist regimes; and of gender studies.

Chapters one and two contain 'aesthetic metaphors' of a small mountain as a lord's runaway daughter (Chapter One) and tufts of horses' tail hair (Chapter Two) that are artifacts both acting on and being acted upon by the Hori Buriad. The 'myth' of the runaway daughter offers an entrée into the particular narratives "discharging a particular effect on the people telling and listening to them" (38). The Buriad's migration from Russia to Mongolia in the 1900s, in addition to their ongoing persecution as a marginal ethnic group within Mongolia during the socialist period, have both produced painful narratives of loss and absence. Among the Buriad, internal distinctions – whether one is Hori or Hudir Buriad, for instance – serve to monitor exogamy practices and keep pre-socialist notions of 'homeland' alive amidst a country, region, polity, and economy in transition and flux. Mongolia's transition to a neo-liberal market economy has reinvigorated differentiations among people economically (class), demographically (district center or rural areas), and occupationally (pastoral herder or urbanite).

Within the large numbers of people who turned to household-based subsistence economies to survive during this period, notions of households, kin networks, and relations of obligation come to the fore as modalities of personhood, alliance, and connection. As a result, Hori Buriad have become increasingly interested in genealogies, exogamy, and shamanism due to a need to understand "who they are in the historic sense" (63). Efforts to reclaim the past that socialism



attempted to eradicate also emerge in vessels, such as the tuft of horses' tail hair, designed to 'harness fortune' for households. Made to appear through a variety of practices, 'fortune' has multiple meanings, but primarily refers "to the concept of a life force... that can be understood through actions that involve tending to a part of an animal or person" (71). Fortune is also always conceived of in relation to such things as animal herds or children. When animals are sold, a part of them, like tail hair, is kept in the household. Containing the piece of the animal allows for growth in a household's fortune. Cairns (*ovoos*), like houses, contain numerous offerings and act as ceremonial sites where monks "'beckon' fortune" (84). *Ovoo* ceremonies are events that both engage people as land custodians (not owners) with the land's 'invisible masters' and legitimate those humans designated by these invisible 'higher authorities' as community leaders. A contained part of an animal and mountain ceremonies are "aesthetics of propriety" – acts that deem the "right way to conduct one's social relations" with people and things (95).

Chapters three and four demonstrate how personhood emerges in relation to other people through interactions with objects on and in the prominently displayed household chest. On the chest (Chapter Three) are photographic montages and embroideries that display kinship connections. Montages are means by which relations and therefore personhood are created, rather than mere representations. Working to dispel the idea of a timelessly nomadic, ahistorical pastoralist culture, Chapter Three describes how objects at the household chest circulate as the household moves through its seasonal places. This circulation incorporates absent people, including outsiders, into the household's wider social connections. For instance, the author's picture with her host family was included in one of the photographic montages on the household chest. In Mongolia's neo-liberal economy, these social connections increasingly include ties to the broader Buriat diaspora and to support networks outside the clan. Montages include pictures of the living and the deceased, thus signifying the ongoing presence of the dead. As with household ancestor portraits in China, the part of the deceased person included in the montage receives offerings from the

living. Serving as modern day genealogies, these montages are as much memories as they are connections to others in alliances.

Chapter Four draws attention to the inside of the household chest with an emphasis on objects such as umbilical cords and tufts of children's hair. As personhood is a process of crafting links to others and separating parts of oneself, the objects inside the chest serve a concealing function. Like the tuft of tail hair from the horse sold in Chapter Two, umbilical cords suggest ways in which people separate themselves throughout their lives, as when daughters mature and leave their natal family for their husband's home. People maintain ties to their home and land of origin, but add layers to themselves as people as they separate from their families and pasts. Maintaining such ties while moving onward in life is another way of evoking fortune for the household in the 'lifecycle' sense of the word.

Chapters five and six focus on the creation of personhood and fortune through the modalities of reflection (Chapter Five) and rebirth (Chapter Six). As "houses both embody and generate different forms of sociality," triptych mirrors above household chests "reflect or deflect knowledge," reveal diverse "modes of agency and personhood," and show a whole that "encompasses multiple modalities" (183). Set behind objects on the chest, such mirrors reflect the objects in front of them and accumulate fortune through these reflections. Mirrors can reveal things about those gazing into them, including otherwise invisible aspects of personhood. The household chest and the objects on or surrounding it form a display that "points to different aspects of people's relations at different points in time" (196). Similarly, people can become vessels that house others through the notion of rebirth. Contained within a living human body, "intra-kin rebirths," demonstrate "a new relation to a severed past" (204). A rebirth in which a living relative houses a deceased kin member allows the Buriad to mourn the deceased while pushing the living to separate themselves from the dead and become relational persons, such as sons and daughters, in the present. Unlike a structural-functional conception of personhood, Buriad ideas of rebirth reveal peoples as made up of attributes that are "different modes of subjectivity that emerge from different encounters" (215). Narratives engendered through the process of rebirth also define

morally acceptable behavior. Memories of the deceased and moral aesthetics for the living emerge from rebirth.

Chapters seven and eight discuss the ways land-based resources and fire reveal broader social anxieties and legitimate people's relational status. Young male hunters (Chapter Seven) move between center (encampment) and periphery (forest) to obtain goods to sell to traders. Mongolia's shift to a neo-liberal economy has brought new ideas, including anxieties, about land privatization and resource access. Men may hunt, but women also engage in actions that "manage and attend to the hunters in the forest" (246). Hunting blurs internal and external boundaries and can thus bring or contaminate household fortune. Reinvigorated attention to land and resources accompanies a resurgence in shamanism. Ambiguously viewed, shamanism is seen by some as a new way of earning income; others view it as an important legitimization of the Buriad position in Mongolia.

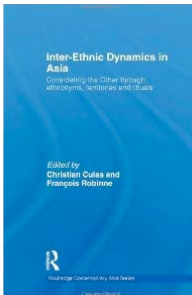
Acts of arson (Chapter Eight), like shamanism, hold an ambiguous power among the Buriad. Occurring in the urbanizing district center, fire, in the form of arson, played a purifying, moral, and fear-evoking role. Houses in the district center, as in the countryside, act as 'agentive artifacts' that show the status of those linked to them. People demonstrate their capability to amass fortune and social prestige through their houses. People responded to the threat of arson by more vigilantly protecting their houses. Fire in a house's hearth was viewed as able to accumulate fortune in the form of "fertility, success, and longevity of the family" (286). Arson, on the other hand, was a technology used to make moral claims about the injustices of wealth inequalities produced by a neo-liberal economy. It also further revealed Buriad ambiguities over their persecution by and complicity with Soviet state power in the socialist past. Acts of arson, like other modalities of accumulating fortune and generating personhood in the volume, hold much in common with practices in other societies undergoing periods of wider political shifts and economic inequalities. These practices are ways of confronting and questioning 'contemporary problems' of shifting modernity.

The concluding chapter deftly draws together these different modalities for facing modernity among the Buriad in Mongolia.

However, readers might have appreciated a longer conclusion given the incredible depth and detail presented in the book's well-crafted, nuanced, and rich ethnography, especially as it could have highlighted concrete examples of the volume's broader application or offered suggestions for future research on ethnic groups in Mongolia. Nevertheless, these few comments do not detract from this ethnography's excellently depicted, well reasoned, and aptly supported presentation of alternative, more enlightened ways of understanding practices in daily Buriad life amid a period of tumultuous transition.

## REVIEW: *INTER-ETHNIC DYNAMICS IN ASIA*

Reviewed by Philippe Ramirez  
(Centre d'Études Himalayennes, CNRS)



Culas, Christian and François Robinne (eds). 2009. *Inter-ethnic Dynamics in Asia: Considering the Other Through Ethnonyms, Territories and Ritual*. London: New York: Routledge. 215. Bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-415-55936-2 (hardcover, 130USD), 978-0-203-86138-7 (ebook, 99.61USD).

One of this volume's many merits is that it sets out to seriously address ethnic categorization in Upland Southeast Asia. Many valuable publications have dealt specifically with ethnicity in this region,<sup>1</sup> where the complex intricacies of collective identities are easily noticed by social scientists. A strongpoint of this volume is its highlighting certain dimensions that have traditionally received little attention. This is thanks to a relatively unusual approach aimed at understanding horizontal inter-ethnic relationships. While many scholars have focused on relations between the state and 'minorities', or on opposition between hills and valleys – and sometimes both, as in the case of Scott (2009) – this compilation examines the manifold identity relations that "structure the ethnic groups' social spaces on a local or micro-regional level" (1).

Several of this volume's contributions deal with ethnonyms, with which anthropologists have an ambiguous relationship, reflecting an ambiguous relationship with ethnicity itself. Noting the fuzziness of generic appellations, many brush ethnonyms aside as having little relevance for cultural interpretation, while others reject ethnonyms outright as colonial constructs concealing genuine social

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Kunstadter (1967), Moerman (1965), Gellner (1997), and Michaud and Forsyth (2011).

facts. Identity categories are too often confined to individual expressions of affective belonging to a culture, or to artificial tools manipulated for the sake of political domination, and therefore it is often overlooked that the forging of ethnonyms might provide deep insights into fundamental social processes. Ironically, the cultural inconsistency of ethnic categories, as theorized by Barth (1969:11-13), has been appropriated by many as evidence of their irrelevance. Paradoxically, anthropologists often unconsciously base their analysis on identity units when they write about a particular 'culture'. Beyond the issue of the specific forms taken by ethnonyms in particular areas, the status of ethnonyms in anthropological investigations and interpretations is not marginal.

The distribution of ethnic categories in Upland Southeast Asia is undoubtedly fuzzy, and contingent upon subjective, almost individual perceptions. As Bouté remarks when discussing the Phunoy category in Upper Laos, "It is possible to obtain almost as many combinations as the numbers of people questioned" (80). As several contributions demonstrate, part of the confusion stems from a lack of conceptual distinction in many local languages between different levels of social groupings. Similarly, Culas evokes "zones of inaccuracy in the autonym categories," (33) a formulation that translates the confusion and the lack of interest the Hmong sometimes display when questioned about ethnic categories. Thus, anthropologists are challenged to understand which 'group' interviewees are alluding to: clans, cultural aggregates, or ethnic categories. It would be too simple to assume that this hurdle is erected by anthropologists and their pre-conceived classifications. Culas rightly invokes the non-linearity of classifications as a possible reason. Indeed, in practice, entities corresponding to clans and ethnic groups dictate many social norms and actions. Another explanation that the authors have not explicitly envisaged might be that ethnic categories are pragmatic, verbalized only within certain relevant contexts, or not conceptualised at all as distinct realities. Nevertheless, a comparison between the various local cases described in this volume suggests that the relevance of ethnonyms varies according to region, time, and scale. Some ethnonyms have a longer history than others and some, more than others, are clearly linked to

descent groups and territories.

Concerning the label 'Kachin' and its various subsets, Robinne found that these generic appellations are part of a modern phenomenon initiated by colonial power and revitalized by contemporary Kachin nationalism. The creation and adoption of such categories had "exponential effects" through the dynamic emergence of numerous "isolates." This does not exclude the emergence of other labels and configurations in the past through the very same processes. As the data presented by other contributors strongly suggest (Gros, Schlemmer, Tapp), ethnic categorisation is a general phenomenon. Though not eternal, it seems to date back to ancient times in most areas and to have always assumed a fundamentally dynamic character. The fluidity of ethnic labels in Upland Southeast Asia and their confusing relation to clans and geography may be for a good part attributed to the impressive mobility of populations. In a very stimulating final chapter, Tapp explicitly questions the general paradigm of the permanent re-construction of identities and cultures, which he contrasts with the "isolationism" and "fundamentalism" of the Hmong. On the basis of data provided by Tapp on the relations between the Han and the Hmong, it seems that 'the' Hmong culture – the "Hmong world" as Tapp puts it – was not persistently isolated but rather, certain Hmong ethnic representations portrayed it as such. In this instance, as in others, ethnicity should be distinguished from culture. Though people have an essentialist vision of themselves, and though they conceive of themselves as isolated, we are not compelled to describe them as such.

In this region, mobility is a major determinant of ethnogenesis. As Gros makes clear, with people constantly on the move, older categories and identities moved with them and were adapted to new places. What was once a clan appellation becomes a toponym, what was once a toponym becomes an ethnic label, and so on. There were cumulative exchanges of designations between descent groups and localities on different scales, and continuous segmentations, producing ethnonyms that were neither purely spatial nor purely descent-based. Consequently, in each particular area, ethnonymy remains strongly affected by hysteresis, i.e., dependence on past environments. Under such conditions, classical cartography is most

ill-adapted to the depiction of ethnic phenomena in the region. Instead, Barth's boundary approach (1969:15-16) again proves effective, as when, for instance, Robinne focuses on what he very aptly calls "articulation zones" (75-76). In fact, Robinne primarily considers articulations between kinship systems to illuminate the trans-ethnic descent entities cutting across identity categories, a very important phenomenon often overlooked by authors writing about Asia. This does not contradict the existence of articulation zones between local ethnic configurations shaped by the different logic of ethnicity. Assertion of the arbitrary construction of ethnic groups should not be taken as far as Robinne does when, following Amselle (1990), he claims that "ethnic isomorphs disappear behind chains of societies" (179). Whatever the external and constructed origin of particular categories, human cultures are made up of chains of societies plus categorisations.

One of the few theoretical weaknesses of this book is an undue concern for the role of "the Other." Making distinctions between the Self and the Other is an important social process. However, an obsessive search for the "management of alterity," as Schlemmer (154) puts it, often leads to underestimating the "management of sameness" that, as shown in the cases described here, is the other component of the single phenomenon of ethnicity. This bias is particularly manifest in the section dedicated to the role of the Other in therapeutic rituals. Here, as in other regions, people call upon various therapists very pragmatically in search of relief. I am unconvinced, by the examples given, that "foreign" specialists are called upon in their quality of "Others" or that the rites they perform aim to enforce the Self/ Other boundary. The notion of exteriority should not necessarily be advanced whenever people from different backgrounds interact. This is what Schlemmer himself suggests in this volume when underlining the pragmatic adoption of techniques by shamans belonging to different ethnicities.

Overall, this publication provides a very consistent data set on local configurations and histories and many new theoretical approaches that encourage us to go beyond the mere acknowledgement of Upland Southeast Asia's anthropological complexity and highlights the numerous interactions between its



different levels of complexity.

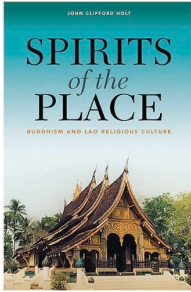
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## REVIEW: *SPIRITS OF THE PLACE*

Reviewed by William B. Noseworthy  
(University of Wisconsin-Madison)



Holt, John Clifford. 2009. *Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. xiii+348. Black and white photographs and maps throughout, seven color plates after page 194, Lao transformations of the *Ramayana*, description of the cult of *kwan*, chapter notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-8248-3327-5 (hardcover, 58USD).

John Holt draws deeply upon more than twenty years of scholarship on the Theravadin world in *Spirits of the Place*, a work that analyzes the historical role of Buddhism in Laos. This work will appeal to scholars in such diverse fields as history, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, US foreign policy, and area studies. In this study Holt turns his focus to the Lao ethnic majority of Laos and the Lao ethnic minority of Isan Province, Thailand,<sup>1</sup> in five chapters that compellingly combine historiographic and anthropological analysis, including what (MacDaniel 2010:120) has referred to as "the best Literature review of scholarship on Lao religion to date..."

In Chapter One, Holt disentangles the Lao tradition from generalizations about Tai peoples by invoking what he sees as fundamental Lao religious structures, wherein *ban*<sup>2</sup> and the *muang*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Lao and Laos are used to refer to the ethnic group and nation, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> *Ban* is a Tai language family term referring to the smallest administrative division. For highland Tai populations living in Vietnam the term is the Vietnamized *bản*. *Ban* is the root of localized Lao society and often translated as 'village'.

<sup>3</sup> *Muang* is also Romanized *meuang* and *muong* and Vietnamized as *mường*. It refers to an administrative division above the *ban* level. During the French colonial period, Lao territory was reorganized into three *muang*. In contemporary Laos, *muang* are subdivisions of provinces. Historically *muang* referred to small confederations or principalities.

enable understanding of how religious worship has been constructed around *phi*<sup>4</sup> spirit cults in traditional Lao culture. Holt argues that these *phi* cults, combined with *kwan*<sup>5</sup> worship, have created a "religious substratum" that represents an underlying cultural layer to Lao religious practice. This underlying cultural layer is thus a lens through which a unique interpretation of Theravadin tradition (20-21) is constructed in Lao culture.

Holt's exploration of the historiography of Lao religious culture draws theoretical influence from the work of prolific French Orientalist, Paul Mus. Specifically, Holt employs Mus's concepts of the "gods of the soil," constructions of "mesocosmic space," and readings of the "monsoon religions" (22-23). Holt relates each of these concepts to the Lao context, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. His explorations of archeological evidence of blended Theravada and Mahayana practices during the eleventh to twelfth centuries in the contemporaneous Nanzhao in China (32) are historically interesting in their broadening of what has been conceived of as the Theravadin world. Holt continues this observation of blended Theravadin practice by examining the central Buddha image for the Lao people (Phra Bang) that they worship, as he argues "as if it were a Hindu deity" (46-7). However, it must be noted that the centralized Lao Luom (ethnic lowland Lao) identities have on occasion tried to separate the authority of such spirit cults from Buddhist authority.

One such period of attempted separation occurred during the colonial period. In Chapter Two, Holt draws upon the region's established historiography to demonstrate the lack of French-sponsored infrastructure development projects compared to the rest of Indochina. He points out that in place of infrastructure, the French established the Buddhist Institute in Vientiane, which in turn sought to provide a Buddhist intellectual counterbalance to the popularization of rational Buddhism under Thai authorities in the wake of the 1902 Sangha act. The aim was to develop a uniquely Lao

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<sup>4</sup> *Phi* is Lao for 'spirits'. *Ho phi* are *phi* shrines, *phi ban* are village guardian spirits, *phi muang* are spirits of the *muang*, and *phi vat* are temple spirits.

<sup>5</sup> *Kwan* is Lao and refers to vital essence or soul.

version of rationalized Buddhism and to 'demythologize' contexts that were seen as prone to Millenarianism, such as that experienced by the French throughout the highlands of Vietnam and regions of the Mekong Delta (86-97). Thus support was given for such concepts as *anicca* (impermanence), *paticcasumpada* (dependent origination), and *bhavana* (meditative practice to cultivate higher states of awareness). Furthermore, the concepts of *sila* (morality), *panna* (wisdom), and *samadhi* (concentrated meditation) were emphasized through the reform, which drew authority from Cambodia after the appearance of the Khmer monk, Choun Naht, in Vientiane at the inauguration of the institute (97). In the end, the centralization of an attempted rationalist Buddhist authority, under the dominance of French colonialism, further alienated highland populations, while simultaneously drawing on Buddhist authority (Jackson 1988, Swearer 1989, and Lopez 2007).

After examining the French consolidation of rational Buddhism in Laos, Holt discusses America's fateful role, which hinged on President Eisenhower's advice during his departure from office in 1961: "If Laos is lost to the Free World, in the long run we will lose all of Southeast Asia" (116). What followed was a violent and devastating conflict that led the Pathet Lao to power.<sup>6</sup> Holt demonstrates that the Pathet Lao were generally perceived as non-Buddhist, although they did "trumpet Buddhism for the sake of national unity" (125), thus initially radicalizing certain members of the Buddhist sangha to supporting the Pathet Lao (128).

In Chapter Three, Holt argues that rationalist causes emerged in cooperation with the state and attempted once again to purge the practice of *phi* worship with the emergence of the Lao PDR under the authority of the Pathet Lao (160). However, the new Lao state failed to create a unified rationalization of Buddhism that united the entire sangha with Marxism. Holt reports that the party was unsure what to do after the demise of the state headman, Keysone. This circumstance is then contrasted with the passing of Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, and

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<sup>6</sup> The Pathet Lao was the Marxist guerrilla group that established the government of the Communist Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).

the party successfully transforming him into one of Mus's "gods of the soil" (171). Holt suggests that an essential contestation exists between the state, or the party, and the common practice of spirit cults (175). This tension, combined with an abrupt confrontation with modernity and the international tourist industry, has gone on to change characteristics examined by Holt in his conversation with *sameneras*<sup>7</sup> who have just entered the sangha.

In Chapter Four, Holt begins his narrative of the changing practice of the *sameneras* through an expression of his "discomfort" with their use of cell phones, riding motorbikes, and chatting with tourist girls (193). This contrast between expectations and reality demonstrates misunderstandings of the practice of Buddhism rooted in Holt's dissertation research. Holt reveals these misconceptions to be common Euro-American assumptions about the behavior of the ideal ascetic *bhikku*. These *sameneras* contrast with such pre-existing notions in their adaptation of commoditized Buddhism through artistic aesthetics. Capitalizing on Buddhism as a means of social mobility is more prevalent than the preservation of notions from the *Vinaya* holy texts that act as guiding precepts for members of the sangha (198-206, Wijayaratna 1990).

In Chapter Five, Holt argues that the roots of Buddhist values and the practice of spirit cults are inseparable in contemporary Laos. The potency of many spirit cults is derived from the magical power of the *mo tham* (holy ritual specialist) based on their ability to observe the *pancasila* (five precepts), which are also essential to the ethical practice of Buddhism (Anonymous nd). Through observation of the *pancasila*, the *mo tham* derive magical power from the root of *thamma*, a Lao expression linguistically and conceptually linked to the Pali *dhamma* and the Sanskrit *dharma* (247). As such, Holt concludes, "Buddhist karmic rationalization has not thoroughly penetrated, rationalized, or domesticated the spirit cults of Laos" (237), as the *phi* vigorously survive due to Buddhist influence (232).

This suggests that belief in the power of *phi* and the power of the Lord Buddha are not mutually exclusive in Laos, nor are believing

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<sup>7</sup> *Sameneras* are young monks who have just entered the sangha generally in their pre-teen or teenage years.

in *phi* and being Christian, and therefore, finally, "It will be extremely difficult to exorcise the spirits of the place" (258).

Criticisms of this volume mirror challenges facing the study of Laos as a whole. First, the great ethno-linguistic diversity that permeates the least ethnically unified country in mainland Southeast Asia has created a disconnect between Lao and non-Lao groups in the lowlands and an inability to see continuities between Lao and Mahayana practice. A second challenge is that much of the highland populations of Laos have been marginalized by history and historiography. Fortunately, Holt's work anticipates these criticisms as he specifically noted them in his introduction and thus *Spirits of the Place* provides ample foundations for future examinations by such scholars as Ian Baird, Pao Vue, and Ryan Ford, who are determined to include the voices of the Laotian highland populations in their research.

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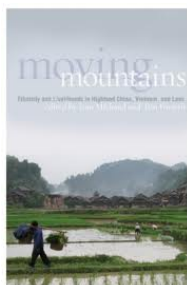
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## REVIEW: *MOVING MOUNTAINS*

Reviewed by William B. Noseworthy  
(University of Wisconsin-Madison)



Michaud, Jean and Tim Forsyth (eds). 2011. *Moving Mountains: Ethnicity and Livelihood in Highland China, Vietnam, and Laos*. xvi+235. Foreword (Terry McGee), illustrations, contributors, index. Toronto: University of British Columbia Press. ISBN: 978-0-7748-1837-7 (hardcover 85USD), (paperback, 37.95USD).

*Moving Mountains* stands out among recent discussions of the Southeast Asian Highlands, drawing from twelve contributors with extensive field experience living and working in locales closed to non-Communist academics between 1945 and 1990 (3). The authors' methodologies focus on the anthropological approach of participant observation combined with oral history. Previously, substantial research had been confined to the experience of "hill tribes" in Northern Thailand (11), unless one gained access to the massive collections of French language research under the École Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO) or the Société Asiatique (SA), both in Paris. As such, this volume's contributors are able to ring out the voices of Southeast Asian Massif populations in a way that demonstrates a mindful assembly of research, while carefully narrating a more complex view of the region than that presented by Scott's (2009:22) "zones of refuge."

Methodologically, *Moving Mountains* draws heavily on Scott, particularly *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), *Domination in the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998), and *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009). Thus, *Moving Mountains* suggests that most new works on the Southeast Asian Massif must act, as has

this volume, in conversation with Scott's works.

As Michaud and Forsyth argue in their introduction "Rethinking the Relationships between Livelihoods and Ethnicity," although the volume examines the integral relationship between the Communist nations of Laos, China, and Vietnam, it also addresses the border zone of this portion of the Southeast Asian Massif from a transnational framework. The advantage of this transnational discourse is that it allows for the examination of both minority populations that have traditionally existed within national boundaries and populations that have moved across national boundaries. This approach thus highlights the problematic discourse of state-oriented policy addressing *national* minorities, and moves the discourse toward a more complex examination of "the relationships between (marginal) local subjects, (global) market forces, and (national) states" (3). An important point regarding these relationships is that the earlier civilizational discourses derived from Christian missionary activities in the region has historically differed very little from similar discourses present in both Marxist rhetoric and neo-liberal reforms (6, 46, 73, 220).

A key theoretical foundation is introduced in Gros' chapter on "Economic Marginalization and Social Identity" that reminds readers that such terms as *montagnard* (Vietnam's highland populations) are ethnonyms, and also *exonyms* for they represent names given to ethnicities from "people who do not belong to that group" (36). The Vietnamese exonym *mọi* was adapted to form the French term *moïs* that was used to refer to uplands peoples throughout the colonial period. Meanwhile, the French term *montagnards* was shortened during the 1960s and 1970s by Americans to form the exonym *yards*. In the contemporary state, the terms *Thái* and *Tày* are exonyms referring to two groups of a dozen Thai-speaking peoples in Northern Vietnam, totaling a population of 3.8 million (148). As is the case with the 'Montagnards' and Gros' case of the term 'Quizì' as applied to Drung populations along the Sino-Vietnamese border, these exonyms generally do not represent accurate forms of self-identification. However, as Gros argues, in the case of the Drung, the levying of ethnic identity in order to excise gains from national programs has

occasionally *increased* dependence on the state, and therefore *decreased* true autonomy (47).

For highland populations, such as the Tarieng – a Mon-Kmher people situated on the Laos-Vietnam border – decreased autonomy has equally come at the hands of the Lao state. As Daviau argues in "Integration of a Lineage Society on the Laos-Vietnam Border," scholars ought, in certain cases, apply a Foucauldian understanding of the *raison d'être* of the Lao PDR to establish a *panopticon* or a "mechanism of surveillance and conditioning of individuals' identities, behavior, and livelihoods under the guidelines of state socialism" (51). This model disassociated the Lao language from standard Thai (53). "Superstitious" animal sacrifice was prohibited as "counterproductive," and the Lao Luom (ethnic Lao majority) *lamvong* 'traditional dance' and *sin* 'skirt' proliferated amongst minority populations (55). Furthermore, highland populations were resettled as part of policy advocating resettlement as a means of economic improvement and integration into the global market (57). Daviau convincingly argues that resettlement is presented as a means for local populations to assert their agency, as individual communities strategize to prevent resettlement, while others opt to participate in government programs (68-69, 73). However, resettlement can also dramatically impact biological diversity. Several rice varieties have been lost from villages in Laos that routinely demonstrate over ten varieties, in a country that holds "half of the global gene bank for rice" (70).

Participation in government programs, as articulated in the case of the Tarieng, is a theme equally communicated in the contrasted oral histories of two Khmu individuals from northern Laos, as presented in Evard's discussion of highland populations that participated in the establishment of the Pathet Lao regime and migration to the lowlands to areas abandoned by the Tai during the War. Other populations who did not side with the Pathet Lao recalled narratives of forced migration (84). Thus, state policy responded with attempts to "strengthen friendship" across ethnic bounds to remind individuals that "the army needs the people like the fish needs water" (89, 93). Again, in this case, the overarching theme of participation in the state economy has now shifted toward participation in the global

market, although the opportunities created can also "create or perpetuate spaces of exclusion and insecurity" (95).

The theme of spaces of exclusion and insecurity is repeated in Claire Tugault-Lafleur and Sarah Turner's examination of "Rice and Spice: Hmong Livelihoods and Diversification in the Northern Vietnam Uplands," where Hmong practices of economy, politics, and cosmology in the territories surrounding the tourist boom town of Sa Pa differ substantially from the majority Việt-Kinh practices that have not always benefited from the Đổi Mới economic reforms instituted in the 1980s (102, 104). In interviews, traditional healers repeated that they must now walk farther and farther into the forest in order to harvest medicine since Đổi Mới (110). In response to the increased pressure of globalization and deforestation, the Hmong have adopted a variety of crops to gain economic security, including wet rice, maize, government subsidized HYV seeds, and black cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*), which have all played an integral role in overcoming food deficits (112, 116). Thus, Tugault-Lafleur and Turner conclude that research must not become trapped in "utilizing an equation in which positive outcomes for those involved are measured only in terms of economic indicators" (118). Rather, the measurement of instances where highland populations exert agency becomes an additional value of research.

The value of agency remains a theme in McKinnon's exploration of "Hani Agency and Ways of Seeing Environmental Change," where deforestation becomes an integral element to the conversation, as local Hani villagers still revere a "sacred forest" even though this forest is only a remnant (125). Local *tusi* 'native officials' have remained an additional integral element to the negotiations of Hani livelihoods over time, despite challenges from national authorities that occurred during the Great Leap Forward and the land reforms of the 1980s, until the "post socialist period" where local farmers have increasingly been able to "farm as they choose" (129-132). For the *tusi* and the Hani, unfortunately, in some cases the ability for farmers to "farm as they choose" has had sustained negative environmental impacts, such as in the cultivation of lemon grass as a cash crop that resulted in deforestation for both planting and collection of firewood needed to refine the crop into oil (136).

McKinnon argues that Hani reverence for the land was demoted to a "hidden transcript" in the process of development. However, this same process reactivated Hani in the context of the *Xibu dakaifa* 'Western Regions Development Program' also known in this volume as the 'Go West' scheme, China's most recent attempt at agriculturally and economically focused land reform (142-143).

The central theme of land reform reappears in Mellac's "Land Reform and Changing Identities in Two Tai-Speaking Districts in Northern Vietnam." This chapter examines the similarities and differences between the comparative case studies of Chợ Đồn (Chi Bồn District, Bắc Kạn Province) and Bản Lướt (Than Uyên District, Lai Châu Province).<sup>1</sup> Both locations have historically been subject to the centralized authority of the pre-colonial Kinh, Tai, or Han; the colonial French, the collectivist socialist, and the post-socialist liberal models of economic governance, continuously adapting their own local-level customary rules (150) to these different authoritarian contexts. However, the allocation of paddy land, official land, the equanimity of access, and the allocation of forestland differed radically in these two cases (164). Mellac's argument justifies flexible wording of legislations that allows for the adaption of local processes, systems of administration, and collectivization that are not necessarily replicas of a "uniform market-driven and individualistic land system" (170).

As another form of local innovation, Swain introduces the concept of "ethnic tourism" in a Yunnan-based case study of "Commoditized Ethnicity for Tourism Development" that describes how highland ethnic groups in Yunnan capitalize on their ethnic identity in regions such as Shilin, Dali, and Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna). Through the narratives of factory owners, trip organizers, local traders, fashion promoters, "performance of ethnicity and the production of identity are expressed through strategically embracing economic opportunities, when attainable" (189).

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<sup>1</sup> *Chợ* derives from the Vietnamese word for 'market' and connotes a central trading location, while *bản*, as used here, represents a Vietnamization of the smallest administrative division of Tai speaking peoples - the village.

The theme of strategic embracement of economic opportunities is central in Sturgeon's examination of "Rubber Transformations" among highland populations of Xishuangbanna. How the "grain for green" program has resulted in a proliferation of rubber plantations in exchange for guarantees of rice from central authorities is justified as environmentally friendly, as the trees are used to prevent soil erosion (202). Though this may provide substantial opportunities for local business elites, Sturgeon concludes that "it is clear that neo-liberal moves such as transferring the financial responsibility for education and medical care to rural residents do not represent a teleological pathway toward 'retreat of the state' on all fronts and may reflect state regrouping rather than retreat" (211).

The volume concludes with some "Lessons for the Future" from Michaud, as a reminder that the discourse over borderlands remains fundamental to discussions of ethnicity in the Southeast Asian Massif. Michaud also reminds us that borderlands can be interpreted more broadly than through a simplistic territorial definition, and advocates locating additional venues for qualitative and quantitative research methods to bring out the voices of those individuals upon the borderlands. He thus demonstrates that examinations of Southeast Asia continue to have global relevance thus the community of Southeast Asian scholars, like the communities these scholars examine, "are not just reactive; they constantly innovate" in their examinations of "truly sustainable livelihoods" (225).

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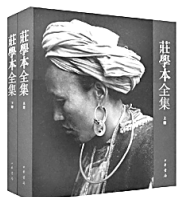


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## REVIEW: *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ZHUANG XUEBEN*

Reviewed by Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa  
(The University of Alabama)



Zhuang Xueben 庄学本, Li Mei 李媚, Wang Huangsheng 王璜生, and Zhuang Wenjun 庄文骏 (eds). 2009. *Zhuang xueben quan ji* 庄学本全集 [*The Complete Works of Zhuang Xueben*], Volumes I and II. Beijing 北京: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局 [Zhonghua Book Company]. 767. Zhuang Xueben's Authored Works, Borderland Photographs List, Timeline, Epilogue. Soft cover. ISBN: 978-7-101-06859-7 (paperback, 688RMB).

Deeply patriotic, dedicated, and self-educated, Zhuang Xueben (1909-1984) typified his generation in many respects. He set out on a self-imposed mission to investigate the underexplored territory between Republican China and Central Tibet in 1934. His writings about his adventures and observations became popular in his native Shanghai and in other urban areas of China, where investigating and categorizing the borderlands were part of broader, nation-building methods during the Republican period. However, what set Zhuang apart from his contemporaries were the extraordinary photographs he took of his journey throughout Mgo log and surrounding areas in 1934. Images of vast landscapes featuring craggy gorges and bucolic villages inhabited by various ethnicities including the Qiang and the Rong were published in the major photographic periodicals of the day, and led to an increased interest in his work and new patronage opportunities from the Republican government that allowed Zhuang to continue his journeys. These extended into Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, and the short-lived experimental province of Xikang, as well as briefly into India. Between 1934 and the end of the 1950s, Zhuang took over 3,000 photographs of the people he met during his travels, and took thousands of pages of notes. He was an excellent example of the young, adventurous Chinese intellectuals of

his day who believed that they could contribute to the stabilization of the Chinese nation by creating studies of its different cultures and peoples.

Following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, he continued this mission in various guises until his political links with the Nationalists eventually led to his marginalization. Though he was politically rehabilitated in the late 1970s, Zhuang's work has remained largely and unfortunately unknown in the history of Chinese photography and anthropology. *The Complete Works of Zhuang Xueben* is thus a long overdue work that brings together many of Zhuang's photographs and writings in two handsomely produced volumes. Edited by Li Mei, Wang Huangsheng, and Zhuang Wenjun, the work is chronologically arranged to provide a systematic and comprehensive overview of Zhuang's legacy.

The nature of that legacy, however, remains questioned. The little research that has been done regarding Zhuang's photographic and written corpus is divided with regards to his motives. The historian Mo Yajun skillfully outlined how Zhuang's work represents the 'objectifying gaze' of Han urbanites at the time, which sought to create an 'other' within hierarchies of Chinese ethnicities against which to contrast the national 'self' and thus consolidate national identity (Mo 2011). In contrast, art curator Zhu Qi has argued that Zhuang was unique for his period in seeking to gain 'spiritual sympathy' with his subjects through depicting them in dignified ways, and through gifting them with copies of their portraits (Zhu 2008: 42-43). Given these varying attitudes towards Zhuang's work, this collection is welcome in that it avoids commentary in favor of allowing Zhuang's own images and words to take precedence, and allows readers to consider the import of these images for themselves. Editorial input is present insofar as not all photographs have been included, since Zhuang was prolific in his photographic and written output, and compiling all this work into a publishable series would not have been feasible. In both volumes, the sizes of photographic reproductions vary, from full-page images to pages containing multiple images with captions. The photographs are interspersed with text, taken from Zhuang's travel diary, as well as extracts from

his books and periodical articles, and occasional photographic reproductions of his notes.

Volume One covers the first nine years of Zhuang's career, from 1928 to 1937. The first section includes images from Shanghai in the late 1920s (10-17), suggesting his development as an artist. With minimal education and no formal photographic training, Zhuang developed his own method through closely reading popular photographic periodicals of his time, including *Liangyou* and *Kodak*. Within a few years, his own work would appear in those journals, after his initial expedition to Mgo log in 1934. This expedition came about after Zhuang gave up working as a clerk to try to join the Nationalist expedition to Central Tibet following the thirteenth Dalai Lama's death in 1934. Due to his lack of contacts, Zhuang was not selected to participate in the delegation. He then set out on a mission through the Mgo log area, which was little known at the time to Chinese scholars. He also visited Rgyal rong, Rnga ba, and the Minjiang River Basin, often traveling on foot with only a single local guide. After his photographs of this journey (Part 1, 22-195) were exhibited in Nanjing, fascination with his representations of this mysterious borderland area grew. Audiences were intrigued by the images of his journey, including crossing rope bridges dangling over perilous rivers, and narrow, winding footpaths on the side of unstable gravel gorges.

Even more evocative and engaging were images of people he met, including the Qiang and Rong inhabitants of the area. These images included full-length portraits that captured the exotic and unique clothing of subjects, and headshots depicting confident subjects staring down the barrel of the camera. These dignified portraits are markedly different from other early anthropological images from elsewhere in the world that often show reluctant, frightened, or in contrast, overly exoticized and sensualized subjects. The engaging manner of Zhuang's portraits is indicative of his unique circumstances as a lone traveler on the borderlands without official patronage or support. Headshot portraits continued to be a staple through the rest of his career, and remain perhaps his most engaging work.

Following the success of this series, Zhuang's fortunes changed when he received Nationalist patronage to continue his travels. Between December 1935 and November 1937, he traveled north, through Gansu and Qinghai (198-411) where he met Tibetan, Monguor (Tu), Mongol, and Salar peoples, and visited the great cultural institutions of the area, including Bla brang Monastery in Xiahe. Despite some critics' argument that Zhuang attempted to present his subjects as timeless, his work is very much a product of his times – for example, in 1937, he was present at the last journey of the ninth Panchen Lama to culturally Tibetan areas (282-289).

Zhuang's work thereafter gradually became more tied to local politics, as he spent the war in the short-lived experimental province of Xikang. Volume Two includes many of his images from this period along with writings on the diverse peoples who lived there, including the Yi (494-575) and the Mosuo (576-601). This diversity is a noteworthy aspect of his work, as many of the communities he photographed in the borderlands had long histories of cultural interaction. His photographs reflect this by including varying types of dress and eclectic material artifacts ranging from religious implements to gramophones and top hats. While photographs from this period have been interpreted as examples of propaganda intended to show development in Xikang, and were reprinted widely in different periodicals of the day, the pictures themselves and the writing that accompanies them are more complex. Though they do attempt to show local cultures in a staged way at times, other, spontaneous portraits and moments from the road also make these images valuable as historical artifacts beyond the politics of the time.

Zhuang was also caught up within the wider currents of contemporary events, as evidenced by his ongoing attempts to enter Central Tibet. In order to gain access to Central Tibet through the southern Himalayas, he joined an India-bound trading company in 1942. Despite this effort, he was unsuccessful in obtaining permission to enter Central Tibet, but the photographs that are included from India are valuable as moments of cultural contact, as Zhuang turned his camera to communities beyond China's frontiers (670-675).

Another sign of Zhuang's links with the politics of the time is the fractured nature of Part Four, which focuses on his work after

1949 (678-721). Although Zhuang continued photographing different ethnic groups for a number of years after the change in government, he was removed from his position as a photographer in 1965 due to his previous position with the Nationalists. He spent the next ten years being marginalized, though he attempted to return to his passions of photography and travel. In a moving section of the work, the editors have included one of the many letters he wrote to Premier Zhou Enlai requesting political rehabilitation (722-731). This appeal is an example of the struggle of a twentieth century Chinese artist to negotiate while remaining pragmatic in relation to changing state motivations. It also suggests Zhuang's continuing commitment to creating work that facilitated the circulation of knowledge about China's diversity within China and on its frontiers, even at political cost to himself. It is one of many elements of his legacy that complicates attempts to paint him as a propagandist while, at the same time, placing him within broader currents of socio-political change.

After Zhuang was politically rehabilitated in 1975, his work began to be recognized again for its contribution to scholarly and political understandings of the borderlands, as well as the national project of constructing national minorities in China in the twentieth century. The book concludes with a bibliography of his work (735), a list of his pictures from borderland areas (747), and a timeline of major events and publications (759). Along with the excerpts from his works included in the volumes, these resources make these volumes an invaluable resource for the study of Zhuang Xueben's life and work.

Zhuang's work was neglected by both scholarly and photographic communities after his death in 1984. However, following the discovery of many of Zhuang's photographs in his family's home and the subsequent mounting of several new exhibitions, as well as this book, the full extent of his importance as a photographer, scholar, and traveler in China's borderlands is coming to light. While the nature of his legacy remains complex, the availability of the sources compiled in these volumes allow for unprecedented access to his work, and for new conversations to develop about its place in twentieth century Chinese borderland

history. These volumes are valuable for scholars interested in twentieth century China, and the Republican position towards minority nationalities and border issues in particular. Importantly, Zhuang's work helps us better understand the processes of modernity and nation building beyond Shanghai and other urban areas at the time. These volumes also have much to offer scholars of Tibet, Northeast Asia, and the communities depicted in the volume, including the Yi, Mosuo, Monguor, Mongols, and other borderland Chinese communities, who will be intrigued by the historical representation of people, places, and material culture that these photographs capture. Similarly, those with an interest in the history of ethnographic photography will find the images striking and memorable. Hopefully, as editor Li Mei states in the epilogue, this will mark the beginning of studies about this important individual, while also serving as a valuable resource for those already interested in his subjects.

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## REVIEW: *RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN THE TIBETAN BORDERLAND*

Reviewed by Bo Wang  
(Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison)



Wellens, Koen. 2010. *Religious Revival in the Tibetan Borderland: The Premi of Southwest China*. Seattle, WA and London, UK: University of Washington Press. xvii+278. Foreword (Stevan Harrell), preface, conclusion, epilogue, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-295-99068-2 (hardcover, 65.04USD), ISBN: 978-0-295-99069-9 (paperback, 27.81USD).

Identity and legitimation are arguably the two most significant analytical tools required to understand religion in contemporary China. Particularly in Southwest China, the uncertainty and ambiguity in the ongoing processes of legitimizing and making ethnic identities attracts scholarship. In studying Chinese folk religion in general, Dean (2003) asserts that "local Chinese religion resists definition" (338). Pondering how to define 'religion' in the Chinese context often proves fruitless, especially in Southwest China where religious revival may involve villagers, ritual experts, monks, and government elites ranging from village heads in the margin to representatives of the Chinese state at the center. Each group holds a distinct perspective on how to legitimize ethnic and religious identities. *Religious Revival* is one attempt to do difficult research through an ethnographic lens.

Drawing on fieldwork in Sichuan and Yunnan, the two southwestern Chinese provinces where most Premi<sup>1</sup> live, Wellens explores the processes of the Premi recovering traditional rituals in the context of the larger post-Mao Chinese political context. Through reviewing histories of political integration and interviewing living

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<sup>1</sup> Also Pumi or Prmi.

Premi ritual experts, Wellens argues that the making of Premi ethnic and religious identity is *relevant* for the local elites who aim to legitimize their control within the larger modernizing Chinese society, while simultaneously *irrelevant* for villagers who seek deities' blessings and protection against evil spirits regardless of who legitimizes the identities. Wellens uses 'irrelevant' to mean that Premi villagers, unlike local monks and governmental elites, are unable to determine if Tibetan Buddhism or the Chinese state legitimizes the ritual. Rather, it does not matter much to them as long as the ritual continues. In his own words: "[despite the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, Maoism, and the post-Mao reform], Premi souls still travel to ancestral lands and are not reincarnated, and deities and evil spirits are still propitiated with blood offerings" (210).

The book features five chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The introduction reviews major works on ethnic and religious identity in the post-Mao era. Wellens realizes that not only is religious revival different from the process of retrieving the past, but that it also responds to the paradoxical effect of China's Reform (1978-present), that is, the disparity between the rich and poor, and "ideological relaxation," referring to the indirect state censorship of religion (9-11). In Chapter One, Wellens describes how Muli, Sichuan's Premi territory, was integrated into the Tibetan Buddhist realm. This was a process in which Sonam Gyatso (Bsod rnam rgya mtsho, the third Dalai Lama) played a key role in introducing the monastic system and appointing local head lamas (18-33). Second, the Qing recognized these head lamas as hereditary native chieftains and placed military/ political representatives in local villages. Third, the structure of co-existing head lamas and government representatives was sustained, though with major modifications, through the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China governments.

In Chapter Two, Wellens reveals that school curriculum, together with marriage certificates, highlight the presence of the current Chinese state at the village and township administrative levels. In Chapter Three, Wellens introduces the Premi house as a social unit that organizes marriages, and as a ritual space for mediating with deities and evil spirits. Polyandrous marriage,

virilocal residence, and ancestor worship, for example, are centered on the house in Premi society.

In Chapter Four, Wellens examines Premi cosmology, beliefs, and rituals around the house, emphasizing their effect on everyday Premi life. For instance, Premi believe that two brothers living in the same house would result in the house being possessed by *brö* 'demons', and the family living in it would face social and ritual exclusion, such as a lack of marriage partners and visits from other villagers, and would be barred from participating in common village ceremonies and celebrations (146-7). The *anji* 'ritual expert' takes responsibility for helping villagers minimize this risk of ostracization. Moreover, with the strong influence of Tibetan Buddhism, the *yèma* (local pronunciation of lama, referring to the local lay version of Tibetan monks) also practices similar rituals with the same purpose. Yet again, the state inserts its power over religion by, for instance, endorsing *anji* and *yèma* to study in Beijing and learn Chinese language in the hope that they will "identify more closely with the Chinese state" (170).

After a holistic, Malinowskian description of the Premi in Muli (Sichuan), Wellens offers a comparative perspective with the Premi in Ninglang (Yunnan) in Chapter Five. Unlike the Muli Premi mistakenly, yet officially, identified as ethnic Tibetans by both the local and state government elites, the Ninglang Premi villagers identify themselves as Premi. Paradoxically, to perform rituals, the Ninglang *hangui* (another name of *anji*, used in Ninglang), due to a lack of Premi ritual knowledge, must learn from the Muli 'Tibetan' *anji* (207). Wellens concludes by pointing out that as long as the form of the ritual exists, by which he refers to scripture, language, and clothing, the Premi can fill it with various community "cultural fabric," infusing ethnic identity with meaningful cultural contexts (209-10).

*Religious Revival* informs the reader about Premi culture both historically and at present, and is a reliable source for researchers interested in the Premi, as well as Tibetans, Na, and other ethnic groups in the region. However, the theoretical framework he uses for relevancy and irrelevancy of religious revival between

villagers and local elites, though imbued with much potential, is not always present throughout his analysis. The two categories of people occasionally overlap, as local elites are, or were, villagers and thus the relation between the two categories is intertwined. For instance, in discussing Premi ritual and cosmology in chapters Four and Five, Wellens presents ethnographic evidence that suggests more agreement than disagreement between the two categories.

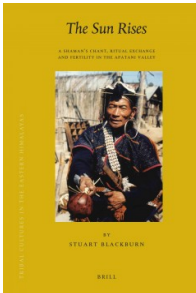
In sum, this book contributes to the literature on contemporary Chinese religion, cultural preservation, political autonomy, and ritual studies and is valuable for comparative studies. In terms of religious revival, it coincides with findings in rural areas where most Han Chinese reside. For instance, in studying religious revival in northern Shaanxi Province, Chau (2005) makes a similar observation: "instead of responding to state-imposed political ideals and campaign goals, villagers today are engaged in social interactions based on kinship or community obligations and responsibilities" (237).

By contrasting the legitimation of ethnic and religious identity between villagers and local elites, Wellens also offers an activist insight on how to gain political autonomy. He suggests that villagers should bring forth their views and distinguish those from the views held by the local elites, as the state continues to be "successful in convincing educated elites to construct their identities in line with its official discourse" (214-6). This observation opens the possibility of exploring community-based activism in the context of Southwestern China.

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Reviewed by Mark Bender (The Ohio State University)



Blackburn, Stuart H. 2010. *The Sun Rises: A Shaman's Chant, Ritual Exchange and Fertility in the Apatani Valley*. Leiden: Brill. xvii+401. Color and black and white photographs, maps. ISBN: 978-9-0041-7578-5 (hardcover, 97USD).

*The Sun Rises* is a model study contextualizing an oral narrative tradition in the social and ritual fabric of a remote community in northeast India. In many ways a companion volume to *Himalayan Tribal Tales* (Blackburn 2008), the text presents the first substantial translation of a key ritual text of the Apatani Valley dwellers in Arunachal Pradesh, located on the contested border between China (Tibet) and India. The Apatani speak a Tibeto-Burman language, practice intensive rice agriculture in carefully terraced fields, and number about 35,000. Their clans populate several centuries-old villages. Until recently, they were separated from the lowlands of Assam and surrounded only by peoples practicing various forms of shifting agriculture. The valley dwellers have increasingly encountered modernization over the last few decades, including Indian and global popular culture, and Christianity.

The heart of this book is a chant of nineteen segments performed during the public Murung feast. This feast is a major opportunity for ritual exchange of foodstuffs and other goods in the community, and also involves the slaughter and sharing of large numbers of *mithun*<sup>1</sup> within complex social networks. On the first day

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<sup>1</sup> Semi-domestic bovine.

of the three-week event, a *nyibu*<sup>2</sup> stands on a large wooden platform built by the feast sponsor and from pre-dawn to late in the day chants an oral poem called the Subu Heniin. This chant calls out the sun from the darkness as it charts the birth of the sun from a woman in ancient times, and describes the creation and genealogies of animals, plants, *mithun*, and humans. A major portion of the chant, which is more a pastiche of segments than a linear narrative, guides *mithun* souls across named landscape features to the underworld where they become gifts for inhabitants. The chant then returns to the land of the living. Such guiding of animal and human souls across landscapes to sites of ancestral origins and/ or the world of the spirits has parallels in many other Tibeto-Burman societies (such as in funerals of the Yi of southwest China) in the Southeast Asian massif and even farther afield in Nepal and ethnic minorities in northeast China. As Blackburn argues, the *nyibu* is, for lack of a better term, a sort of shaman, though the *nyibu* does not enter a trance state during the recitation. *Nyibu* are conservative members of Apatani communities who still wear traditional hairstyles, tattoos, and clothing common a few generations ago. Presently about ninety *nyibu* (all male) are active in the valley.

According to the introduction, the book is divided into intersecting portions that relate material on cultural context, the performer of the chant, and the chant itself. Drawing on oral performance theory, folkloristics, and anthropology, Blackburn presents a thorough and detailed treatment of the Murung event and its comparison with feasts of merit from contiguous areas in Southeast Asia, the role of the *nyibu* within the contexts of Apatani beliefs, ritual, and the Murung event itself. This weaving of themes is highly effective and is very much in line with the goals of the performance school of folkloristics and its stress on performers and audiences, performance events, contexts, and ramifications of texts and performances in the community. Aside from the main text, the book also offers several thorough appendices, including an outline of Murung events, a complete transcription of the Subu Heniin chant, a

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<sup>2</sup> A local ritual specialist.

list of shares of sacrifices for spirits and humans, and more information about of feasts of merit in the eastern Himalayas.

Aside from the detailed ethnographic frame of the Subu Heniin ritual text, Blackburn carefully charts what Lauri Honko (2000) calls the 'textualization' process, offering thoughtful disclaimers for the nature of the translation. The text is a somewhat modified version based on recordings made in the home of Mudan Pai, a fifty-five year old *nyibu*. The recording was made by Blackburn's assistant, Hage Komo, who collaborated with Blackburn in rendering the text into an as yet non-standard Apatani Romanization system, and then a somewhat modified English version. The text was tweaked for clarity and readability in places, while preserving as much original content as feasible. The author straightforwardly describes the sort of challenges facing translators of such materials, including: the difficulty of making intelligible recordings (whether in the festival contexts or homes) in the absence of sound-booth conditions; differing ideas of what a 'translation' means to trained professionals and key informants; and locating persons truly familiar with the dense and often obscure ritual idiom and other linguistic barriers. The author provides a readable and well-annotated English text and an accurate Romanized Apatani version (in an appendix) that will serve as a touchstone for both the existing fragments of the rituals recorded by a few earlier ethnographers and any ensuing versions that others might make.

Blackburn discusses textual themes that include fertility, ritual journey, and exchange. The content of the Subu Heniin text begins with the birth of the sun from a woman's body, which Blackburn notes is recurrent throughout the text. Another important motif is a species of fecund bamboo, a piece of which is actually part of the *nyibu*'s headdress. Many segments of the text narrate the origins of other things, such as section eight, which relates the origin of water and includes many details of various river systems' flora and fauna (particularly fish). This section is followed by another on the origins of the sprits and the creatures of which they are ancestors, for instance, "The ancestor of the bee/ is Tayu Kopu" (217). The various catalogs suggest a great intimacy with native wildlife. A section of the texts also deals with the origins and actions of a mythical trickster ancestor known as Abo Tani. In one passage, the figure, who has had

no luck with women, is introduced by his sister to a woman who, while weaving on a porch, is impregnated by semen falling from a bamboo container carried by a flying bird (227). The resulting child's origin is subject to gossip, so a competition is held to determine the real father. As the child was birthed from his mother's vagina (rather than a leg, arm, forehead, etc.), it was acknowledged as Abo Tani's. The child, Ato Neha, became the local people's first human ancestor.

An account of the division between *mithun* and humans follows these events. The text narrates that two *mithun* sisters were born of the same womb, but one became a human, while the other became a *mithun*. The section also deals with the origins of domestic cows, goats, dogs, and pigs. In the latter sections, the *nyibu*, in the midst of his chanting, guides the souls of sacrificed *mithun* to the underworld as gifts to the spirits in hopeful exchange for their favors to the human gift-givers. The symbolic interdependence of humans and *mithun* is related: "Man and *mithun*/ you are joined together/ like necklaces and bracelets" (77).

Blackburn notes affinities in content with ritual feast chants from eastern Indonesia and Hawai'i in his search for parallel chant traditions in the eastern Himalayas. He also indicated parallels with Kachin chants in northern Burma, Zhuang and Lahu creation narratives in southwest China, ritual texts from eastern Nepal, and a text from an Adi group in central Arunachal Pradesh associated with a feast tradition (58-61). The documentation of these latter texts, however, lacks information on performance and cultural context.

As more work emerges on how such chants are related to performance events and social dynamics, a clearer picture of the Subu Heniin and possibly related traditions will emerge from both northeast India and southwest China. More information certainly lies with the study of ethnic groups in southwest China, in particular subgroups of the Yi ethnic group. For instance, the *Hnewo tepyy* 'Book of Origins' of the Nuosu of southern Sichuan is concerned with origins of things, genealogies of a whole range of life forms and clans of various local ethnic groups, and history (similar to the content Blackburn describes in the Subu Heniin) and is performed by either *bimo* priests or skilled folk singers, who often use an antiphonal style, in a variety of ritual/ feast contexts (funerals and weddings in



particular) that involve the killing of large bovines and complex patterns of foodstuff sharing and gifting.

In terms of content, a number of key motifs appear in some form in both texts. Among these is the motif of a mother of a progenitor/ culture-hero who is weaving and becomes impregnated by semen (Subu Heniin) or blood (Nuosu) falling from the sky (interestingly, a similar narrative involving weaving, pregnancy, and the sun has been recorded among the Zuni in North America in a tale called 'The Boy and the Deer,' see Tedlock 2009). Other parallels could be drawn with many fertility motifs found in epics of the Miao of Southeast Guizhou, China, where there are cyclic mass slaughters of water buffaloes and the chanting of origin texts. Like the Apatani Valley, these areas in Guizhou have long been involved in intensive rice production.

*The Sun Rises* is valuable as a study of ritual texts in the cultural area of the eastern Himalayas and comparable cultures around the globe. It is especially useful in cross-cultural studies among Tibeto-Burman speakers (in particular) and other ethnic communities in southwest China, northeast India, and upland Southeast Asia in terms of the abovementioned soul-guiding texts, origin narratives, and migration accounts.

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## 书评－滕华睿的《建构现代中国的藏传佛教徒》

作者：郁丹 (Dan Smyer Yu), 曾吉卓玛 (Zomkyid Drolma)



滕华睿. 2012. 建构现代中国的藏传佛教徒 Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China. 香港：香港大学出版社. xxi+344. Black and white illustrations. Soft cover. ISBN 978-9-6220-9274-7 (150HKD).

滕华睿(Gray Tuttle)的著作《建构现代中国的藏传佛教徒》(*Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*)之英文版在2005年由哥伦比亚大学出版社出版后很快成了一部畅销学术性作品，在中国的藏学界、佛学界都引起了极大的反响。懂英文的学者大多通过各种渠道购买到该著作的英文版，继而滕华睿书中的关键论点：“佛教是现代汉藏民族之间的桥梁”在中国汉藏学者之间被反复引用，或在高等院校及科研单位的专题研讨中被频繁提及。时过六年之后其汉语版终于与中文读者见面了，无论在中国还是在欧美，当下“藏学热”的重心日趋转移到有关现今汉藏文化多层次互动的研究视角上，因此滕华睿的著作给中国学者带来了有关历史的新解读。作为译者和当代藏学家的陈波在翻译及编辑出版过程中，表现了极其孜孜不倦的精神，令读者感到万分钦佩。在译文中他提到在2006年时就已经完成此书的中文版翻译，但“由于诸多原因，公开出版一直拖延下来”（陈2012:xv）。在全球化发展的背景下，中国的藏学国情也在不断地积极、主动的变迁着。不得不提的是，陈波在“译者的话”里讲到在此书地翻译过程中，不仅得到了原作者滕华睿的大力支持外，还得到了中国重量级的社会学家马戎先生及藏学家陈庆英先生等人的鼎立支持及审阅，因此我们说，此书中文版的最终问世实属不易。

这篇书评是由汉藏两位学者合著而成，在书评里我们有意无意的融入各自汉藏民族的主观性的不同观点。当然，作为从事当代藏汉佛教民间互动的研究及宗教文化的人类学、民族学学者而言，书评中我们的观点大多源于各自学科的理论及“民族志田野”(ethnographic fieldwork)中形成的一些看法。腾华睿的汉藏史学的基点，即佛教是汉藏民族之间的桥梁——其实在中国和欧美学界都不陌生。在中国汉藏历史研究中，佛教桥梁不单纯是汉藏宗教的链接，而且是汉藏之间始于唐朝的姻亲血缘关系的体现。从这个层面上讲，这座佛教桥梁及文化桥梁也是维系汉藏感情的纽带。这个显而易见的汉藏历史情结在陈波的翻译过程中也有充分地表述。比如当提到中国藏学与欧美藏学的差异时，他写道：“作为中国人，我发现这类西方表述和我的知识及情感相冲突”（陈 2012：xxi）。陈波主体中的民族和国家认同毫不含糊地提倡“和谐及民族团结”（陈 xvi）。欧美藏学界认同这个普遍性，把汉藏佛教桥梁解读为“施主/护主—上师之关系”(teacher-patron relation)。这在戈尔斯坦(Melvyn C. Goldstein)等学者的著作里频繁提到。同时，欧美藏学界很注重领土的划分，在使用“西藏”和“中国”的字眼时直接或间接地把两者作为两个分开的地理、文化、民族概念来对待。这与中国藏学者统一的国家概念是不一致的，中国藏学界自然默认西藏是中国主权的一部分，在习惯上西藏指的是西藏自治区而不是欧美学者泛指的“文化西藏”、“地理西藏”或“大西藏”，意指卫藏(dbus gtsang)、康(khams)、安多(A mdo)三大藏区的综合体。腾华睿对西藏是中国的一部分也是认可的，只是用了戈尔斯坦(Melvyn C. Goldstein)的“事实上的独立”来讲述民国政府当时在西藏的主权真空。在这点上，我们与陈波的看法一样，腾华睿著作的中心点不是研讨民国时期的领土问题，而是现代史上汉藏之间重要的宗教、文化及政治上的牵连。正如陈波所说，“...把本书置入政治辩论的漩涡中，会削弱其学术影响力。”（陈 xxi）

在过去的十几年中，藏族现代历史受到很多人的关注，尤其是来自中国、北美及欧洲的学者对此产生了浓厚的兴趣，进行了前所未有的研究。在西方出版的多部著作中囊括了戈尔斯坦的《西藏现代史（1913—1951）：喇嘛王国的覆灭》、次仁夏加的《龙在雪域：1947年以来的西藏当代史》、和达瓦诺布的《中国的西藏政策》，而在中国，有泽仁邓珠的《藏族通史 吉祥宝瓶》和丹珠昂奔的《藏族文化发

展史》。与其他学者不一样的是滕华睿的《建构现代中国的藏传佛教徒》着重与把藏传佛教移向藏汉文化的中介地带及中国现代国家构建的过程中。在这样的场景下，藏传佛教不局限于其文化地理中，而是形成了一个在汉藏之间流动的宗教思想与实践体系。这是滕华睿对现代藏学的一大贡献。比如，他通过参阅其他亚洲佛教国家使用佛教伦理来构建现代政体的历史，把“泛亚洲佛教原则（pan-Asian Buddhist principle）”（滕 2012:69）理论观引入到他对民国时期佛教历史地位的解读。滕华睿吸取汉藏文文献，向我们呈现出一个值得关注的案例，即在 20 世纪早期中国在快速进入民族国家的进程中，一些著名的藏族喇嘛与他们的汉族信徒之间的跨文化佛教交流具有很大的政治功能。佛教当时的确有不可忽视的政治作用，但是藏传佛教在当时政治作用的大小是很具学术争议的。

不可否认，像梁启超、太虚、戴季陶、能海和法尊这样的历史人物在滕华睿著作中频繁提到，而这些人物在同一时期有关汉藏历史的著作中却少有描述。而滕华睿的研究表明这些人物可以说明西藏与中国内地佛教界间有广泛的交流与沟通，且在构建现代中国民族国家中扮演了重要的角色。民国时期汉藏佛教的互动是存在的，但我们不太赞同滕华睿在其著作中所表达的频繁性、广泛性及国家政治性。

根据滕华睿所呈现的民国时期藏传佛教徒来看，总体上包括知名喇嘛，比如班禅大师、诺那呼图克图、喜饶嘉措，七世章嘉活佛以及他们的汉族信徒。然而，从现代中国史学研究的观点看，藏传佛教徒或者甚至说汉传佛教徒在建构现代中国中所扮演的角色是微不足道的。自 20 世纪出现现代化的号召后中国内地就卷入了一场以追求西方文化为时尚，以抛弃传统文化为光荣的一种现代化线性思维中，于是开始实行“反宗教运动”，“政府和社会精英中的现代化的改革者把民间宗教与文化领域视做建立一个迷信的、理性实足的世界的最主要的障碍”（杜 2003:100）。西方文明的冲击使佛教在中国的地位更趋边缘化，当时的中国社会是一个以儒、道、佛三家思想为本位的社会。佛教作为传统制度性宗教在当时中国社会面临同样忧患的境地。比如，在清朝末年，梁启超曾极力提倡将佛教作为中国的国教，但其中不包括藏传佛教（参见梁 1978），这个宏伟的宗教理想很快就淹没在当时中国知识分子推广的西方科学和西方反宗教的理念中。从这个视角看，当

时的中国社会里藏传佛教和汉传佛教都不是近代社会的主流话语，这一点在杜赞奇（Prasenjit Duara）、刘禾（Lydia Liu）、薇拉-施娃茨（Vera Schwarcz）还有其他学者的关于满清和民国的著作中有所体现。

在滕华睿所提及的历史人物中，戴季陶似乎是民国时期对佛教最关心的政治家，就像作者所说的“第一个认为佛教是内地和西藏之间起关键桥梁的汉人政要是三十年代的戴季陶”（滕华睿 2012:211），戴提出了针对建立包括西藏在内的中国近代民族形态的泛亚佛教原则，滕华睿的这个历史观点我们认为戴季陶在民国时期的官位在西藏问题上和把泛亚佛教原则融入新生现代中国国体中起到的政治作用不是很明显。在我们所阅读的历史文献中，在中国国民党蒙藏事务委员会中戴季陶没有官方职位，而蒙藏委员会在维护中国在西藏地区的主权上是至关重要的国家机构，戴季陶在民国政府内任职最长的职位是 1928 年到 1948 年间的中华民国考试委员会主席，任期到他在广州自杀的前一年。在我们的印象中，戴季陶为藏传佛教在中国政体中的渲染所做出的努力分量是微乎其微的。

在翻阅相关历史资料时，我们的看法是当时汉藏之间有佛教的互动，但是在很大层面上是局限于个人的宗教与精神追求。这些个人宗教行为延续了历史上汉藏文化的互动。在一些学者的研究中发现：“汉藏教理学院邀请以九世班禅、诺那呼图克图、更桑活佛为代表的藏传佛教高僧在内地弘法，把藏传佛教的密宗及道次第等思想传入内地，并且拥有了很多汉族信徒，从而达到文化上的交流和沟通。”（参见，王 2008:34；李水奎 2009:19-36）。但是，当时汉传佛教徒为了学习藏传佛教的密宗和教义，“由 30 人组成学法团，克服藏区语言、饮食、环境等障碍入藏学习佛法，但最终学成而归的也只有两人而已。”（唐 2009:144）。其中法尊大师在学成而归后在太虚大师的催促下到汉藏教理学院任教，在此期间，他翻译了宗喀巴大师的许多著作，其中包括《菩提道次第广论》、《菩提道次第略论》和《菩提道次第修法》等，而且也将汉文的典籍翻译成藏文。但是，我们认为民国时期藏传佛教在汉地的传播是西藏文化在民间的延续过程，其规模从中国整体上看是很小的。

对于太虚、法尊、能海和其他的汉传佛教大师而言，他们最初的目标聚焦在振兴汉传佛教上。滕华睿强调太虚法师作为“政治和尚”

(Tuttle 2005:121) 而没有提及太虚法师根本的佛教改革愿望,即人间佛教。这是受到国人高度赞扬的并积极关注的佛教实践活动。比起藏传佛教在当时的国人心中所发挥的功效,太虚法师更关注汉传佛教在普度众生和振兴中国国家精神内涵方面的作用。本质上,太虚法师的人间佛教在实质上与当下西方佛教徒提倡的“佛教的社会性”(socially engaged Buddhism)是相等同的。太虚法师的人间佛教也可以追溯到梁启超在清末试图开始推进的“应用佛教”(1995)。梁启超杜撰的这个术语来源于他在欧美接触到的“应用物理学”(applied physics)(梁 1978)。20 世纪上叶,中国处于地缘政治衰弱和国内政体混乱中,汉传佛教几乎濒临全盘腐败的境地。太虚法师和他的弟子们转向藏传佛教的首要目的是通过藏密来振兴汉传佛教。

在这样的社会大背景下太虚等人发起救图存亡的佛教复兴运动,即“开创反贵族的人民佛教,和反鬼神的人生佛教”理念(太虚,转引自李尚全 2009:122),通过讲经说法,发起佛教改进运动使中国内地的僧俗人士对佛教产生新的认识,革新清末以来汉传佛教发展的颓势,大力提倡入世佛教,对其教理、教制和教义等方面进行改革并向西藏僧侣制度学习,依照藏传佛教修行的次第、戒律和管理体系等方面来规范内地的佛教,倡导将倚重出世和关注生死问题的佛教改造成注重现实的“人生佛教”或“人间佛教”。然而,太虚的佛教复兴运动最终未能成功,这说明在近代中国这样一个激烈复杂的社会环境下,佛教的现代化不是构建现代民族国家进程中的关键所在,而且这一转型工作也的确是难以完成的。对 20 世纪的中国而言因为来自西方的文明冲击,导致的另一个后果是其地位的进一步边缘化和反对化。佛教与其他宗教一样,以信仰为其基本特征,西方科学的传入和发展继而使宗教的信仰成为科学的对立面。诚如释东初法师所言:“近代中国佛教,无可否认的,外受西教东来,即西方文化及机械科学的影响,内受打倒迷信及反宗教运动,以及庙产兴学的迫害,激起佛教徒警觉,一面打倒以往历史传统的观念,革新佛教制度,一面接受新世界知识,以期迎头赶上时代,建设适应新时代社会所需要的新佛教。”(释 1974,转引自沈伟华、杨维中 2010:83)太虚所倡导的“人间佛教”之所以在这一时期遭到失败,是因主流社会重“科学”而轻“宗教”的结果。

事实上，二十一世纪的今天，太虚法师的人间佛教才在汉传佛教中较大规模流行成为公众话题及新型的佛教实践，而且在当代汉藏佛教对话中也凸显其特殊地位。从规模上进行今昔对比，在民国时期太虚法师为人间佛教的后期扩展和汉族佛教徒学习藏密播下了种子，但是其在构建现代民族国家上的效应不具很大的影响力。

我们从人类学文化的观点看，滕华睿其实在他著作中是认可现代中国社会的这个现状的，即普通汉族人口对藏族文化和藏传佛教的了解几乎还在零起点。他比较了西方人对藏文化的高度兴致中得来这一观点的。比如，陈波也注意到：“十九世纪末，美国外交官柔克义在北京，凭藉巨大的财力优势，花了四年的时间搜集市面上可见的有关西藏的汉文著作，结果他只搜罗到六部有关西藏的专著，而另外七部只是附带提及西藏，……同期比较，英文著作有关西藏的，包括双语字典等，简直数不胜数，而且都是公开出版发行”（陈 2012:xvi）。尽管西藏是中国的一部分，汉族与藏族平民之间实际的文化互通基础还是非常薄弱的，比如，滕华睿注意到“汉人的意识形态或者政治体系未曾渗透入西藏：儒教、科举考试、书写体系，以及在东亚其他地方广泛传播的汉文明中的其他成就，都从没有引入到西藏”（2012：7）。再看汉族方面，太虚法师和他的弟子转向藏传佛教表明在文化和宗教意义上汉族文化精英对藏文化的了解开始了现代篇章，但从中国整体国家政治看，其规模甚微。滕华睿在展示西藏和内地政治、宗教交往时仅限于原西藏噶厦政府和清政府及民国政府之间的交往的同时，也默认甚微的汉藏民间交往。就拿清朝举例，滕华睿的研究表明，在清政府期间藏族精英和满族精英之间的确存在横向的频繁交往，而几乎没有证据表明藏族和汉族平民之间在文化上有较大规模互动（Tuttle 2005:16）。

另外，滕华睿还注意到晚清民初时期不论是藏族文化精英还是汉族文化精英都从欧洲直接引进近代宪制国家理念和用其框架来认同自己的民族性。但是，汉藏当时的沟通桥梁几乎是空缺的。民国时期藏族方面使用这些现代西方民族的理念性并不是很明显，正如滕华睿展现的那样，原西藏噶厦政体是宗教和政治的结合体即政教合一。在这个宗教政权中，佛教徒的价值观往往成为藏族政治的精华。欧洲国家的民族模型是一个宗教从政治中分离的世俗化的过程。从文化层面



上讲，这个现代民族理念在本质上与藏传佛教作为藏族政治文化基石是相悖的。1951 年之前藏族的现代民族主义策略的失败可以理解为是藏族人民抵制西方风格的世俗文化嵌入其民族政治中。至于西方的种族概念，其对肤色差异的痴迷是众所周知的。滕华睿也提及，藏语没有足够的语词来翻译“种族”或“人种”(race)。藏语“米”(mi)一般意味着“人”而没有种族的含义。从文化角度看，藏族身份认同牢牢地束缚于佛教的神话和历史中。强调人种差异的西方种族意识并没有在西藏得到普及。藏传佛教作为藏文化根基延续受到藏族文化精英和民众的格外护佑，其原因是其在藏人中不可替代的民族性的标志。

总的说来，我们认为滕华睿的著作更多的可作为历史人类学著作而不是单一的历史著作来阅读。他使用的个案在微观层面上阐述了两个民族间宗教文化的互动。而且这些近代和现代藏族与内地佛教徒之间的交流大都局限在藏族与汉族土地接壤的地区，以及汉族文化精英的个人精神追求和其用藏传佛教来重振汉传佛教的愿望及运用佛教思想来构建现代民族国家的想象。

总体上看，我们觉得滕华睿著作中的“藏传佛教徒”无论是藏人还是汉人，他们在构建现代中国的过程中没有扮演关键性的角色。从近代历史上看，孙中山的中华民国的立国理念和宪法都没有丝毫的佛家世界观，而是基于欧洲启蒙思想的三民主义，即民族、民权、民生。从个人背景看，孙氏家族都信仰基督教，其立国治国的精神和伦理源泉，除了自己的民族传统外，来源于自己留洋时得来的西学理念。孙氏的继承人蒋介石也接受了基督教。民国的文化及宗教保持了中国自古以来多元的格局，但是汉传佛教和藏传佛教都没有像在清政府时期那样进入宫廷和国家政治。佛教的现代性当时可以说在梁启超先生及太虚法师的著作和公众话语中体现出来，最具现代性的是他们各自提倡的“应用佛学”及“人间佛教”，但是最终所建立的宪制国家不带有佛教现代性，更不带有藏传佛教的色彩。

忽略我们对滕华睿的著作中对其核心思想的不同看法，其中最让我们有共鸣点的是他对汉藏两个民族地缘文化交界处中佛教在民间的互动的阐述。我们与其他学者一样认为佛教是汉藏民族间的一座不可或缺的桥梁，但是在现代中国国家构建中，无论是民国还是人民共和国，藏传佛教的作用和地位都甚微。历史上有很多佛教徒忧国忧民，

但是都没有真正像斯里兰卡、缅甸等佛教国家那样把佛教世界观和伦理实践注入到国家体制里去。我们推荐这本书给那些对藏传佛教的跨文化性和跨区域有兴趣的读者们，藏传佛教作为世界性的宗教，其超世的宗教世界观明显地没有限制在个体化民族性上，而是不断地突破民族、语言和文化的疆界。

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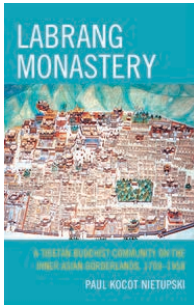
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## REVIEW: *LABRANG MONASTERY*

Reviewed by Christina Kilby Robinson (University of Virginia)



Nietupski, Paul Kocot. 2011. *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709-1958*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. xxxi+272. Three maps (vii-ix), Family History: Gönpö Döndrup and Pronunciation and Word Lists, with Tibetan transliteration, bibliography, index. A publication of the *Studies in Modern Tibetan Culture* series. ISBN: 978-0-7391-6443-3 (hardcover, 80USD), 978-0-7391-6445-7 (ebook, 80USD).

Nietupski's latest monograph is a rigorous study of Labrang (bla brang) Tibetan Buddhist Monastery and its surrounding communities in present-day southern Gansu Province. Employing a rich array of sources from Chinese government archives, Tibetan monastic literature, American missionary records, and over a hundred oral interviews, Nietupski crafts a multi-faceted historical overview of Labrang as a center of religious and political power within a multiethnic community facing conflict and change.

Readers of Nietupski's (1999) publication based on the Griebenow Archives will applaud the depth and substance of his newest book. Here, Nietupski redoubles his research efforts to expand his previous book on two main fronts: first, he extends his temporal scope from an early twentieth century emphasis (1921-1949) to a full two and a half centuries of life at Labrang (1709-1958); second, he shifts his focus from family histories to social history, making extensive use of archival and institutional sources. The result is a satisfying, macro-historical presentation of greater Labrang that complements the micro-historical approach of his 1999 publication. Taken together, Nietupski's two Labrang monographs comprise a singular achievement that should soon be widely emulated within the field of Tibetan Studies.

In his introduction, Nietupski offers a thesis – that at the crossroads of cultures, the greater Labrang community successfully maintained a Tibetan Buddhist identity – as well as a compelling insight into "border and frontier cultures" at large. Contemporary discussion of minority polities in the Qing era often relies on a center-periphery binary framework, but Nietupski instead applies the idea of the 'border' to argue that a peripheral or frontier power can become a center in its own right precisely because of its situation within a dynamic zone of difference. "In the case of Labrang, because of its size, its pedigree, and prestige, its sense of sovereignty was amplified by being juxtaposed to different sovereign powers; the very fact of being located on a border served to develop a powerful sense of unity of self and exclusion of other" (xvi). It is within this contested context of pluralism, Nietupski argues, that Labrang Monastery rises as a local sovereign power and a trans-regional political player.

Chapter One (Amdo: An Overview) offers an historical introduction to the Amdo Tibetan cultural region that encompasses much of present-day Qinghai and Gansu provinces. This chapter highlights the development of Tibetan Buddhist institutions in Amdo, the long-term ethnic Mongol influence in the region, and the political turmoil in central Tibet that formed the backdrop for Labrang's founding and early survival.

Chapter Two (Tibetan Religions in Amdo) details the institutional structure of Labrang: its colleges, its curriculum, its offices, and the various forms of Buddhist intellectualism, ritual practice, and community service in which Labrang monastics engaged. In particular, Nietupski sketches the literary career of one of Labrang's intellectual luminaries, the third Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me, 1762-1823). Nietupski also offers a glimpse into the unusual integration of a Nyingma (Rnying ma) college of lay tantric adepts into Labrang's Géluk (Dge lugs) administrative structure. Discussion of Labrang's adjacent nunneries and their position within the Labrang institutional landscape remains an important task for future research.

Chapter Three (Labrang's Society) presents what is perhaps the most valuable research contribution of the book: a detailed

description of the social and political divisions of greater Labrang and its nomadic populations. Nietupski outlines numerous terminologies for offices and social units, discusses the interface between monastic and lay bureaucracies, and details Labrang's systems of estate management, agricultural production, taxation and corvée enforcement, dispute resolution, and militia operation. The theme of Labrang Monastery hierarchs acting simultaneously as political arbitrators, economic managers, and religious figureheads resounds throughout this chapter. Nietupski's rendering of the complex composition of Labrang society provides a valuable case study of the socio-political functions of Buddhist monasteries and contributes to the growing literature on the subject (e.g., Pichard and Lagirarde 2003, Gunawardhana 2009, Walsh 2009, and Prasad 2011).

In Chapter Four (Growth and Development: The Evolution of Labrang Monastery), we read a history of the major reincarnation lineages at Labrang and biographical summaries of the careers of the Jamyang Zhépa (‘jam dbyangs bzhad pa) and Gungtang lamas, with special attention to their management of interethnic conflict and tolerance of religious diversity. Chapter Five (Twentieth-Century Labrang) explores the growing political instability and violence between Tibetans and Muslims that marked Labrang's experience of the Chinese Republican period. Here we see a stronger focus on the leading Alo Clan, their experiments in public education and modernization, and their transition from Nationalist into Communist politics. The conclusion, Chapter Six (Visions and Realities at Labrang), engages difficult questions of identity and sovereignty, arguing that even in the midst of intricate diplomatic relationships with powerful neighbors, Labrang maintained its authority and the Tibetan Buddhist worldview on which that authority rested.

This work models the depth and breadth of research that is possible when one site is embedded in primary sources representing multiple language groups and diverse vantage points. Still, while Labrang Monastery's situation at the nexus of such varied source material is exceptional, its social and economic complexity is more the norm than the exception among Tibetan religious institutions. This work should quickly become essential reading for students of Tibetan religion, history, and anthropology. As a "search for place," which Sørensen et al. (2007) define as "a method that seeks to

combine texts and ethnography, in an attempt to establish what we may term historical geography," *Labrang Monastery* overwhelmingly succeeds. Those involved in the "search for place" in other regions will benefit from Nietupski's model of diligent and thorough exploration encompassing both the high ideals and the lived realities that together make a "place."

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